THE PRICE SHE PAID

AUTHOR OF

SAINT SIMON'S NIECE

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THE PRICE SHE PAID.

A NOVEL.

BY

FRANK LEE BENEDICT,
AUTHOR OF "SAINT SIMON'S NIECE," "MADAME," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON: F. V. WHITE & CO.,
31 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1883.

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CHAPTER I.

"YOU are not going to get rid of me as soon as you expected, Phil," said Georgia, meeting her friend at the door of her room, as she went up-stairs to change her riding-habit.

"Ah! well, I must bear my burthens," returned Phillis. "But what do you mean? Your aunt would never consent to go away and leave you here."

"She is obliged to stop and play nurse. Mrs Mayford has sprained her ankle."

"Oh, the poor soul! And how is she ever to manage to keep still? Is she badly hurt?"

"The doctor says she must not leave her bed—or at least her sofa—for ten days," Georgia replied; "but come in while I dress and I will tell you all about it."

Phillis followed her into the chamber and sat down, divided between conflicting reflections—sympathy for Mrs Mayford, for she could never hear of any creature suffering without feeling that—pleasure at the idea of keeping Georgia still longer, and a quick recollection that Maurice Peyton would remain also—a recollection which disturbed her greatly.

Georgia, busy with her toilette, did not notice Phillis's troubled face. Her eyes shone with a restless light, and two deep lines traced themselves between her brows, as was always the case when she was thinking deeply, but her stern habits of self-control enabled her to listen to Georgia's remarks and reply without any appearance of being occupied by any thought outside their conversation.

They pitied Mrs Mayford, indulged in sympathy for the trials which awaited Aunt Conyngham, and then Georgia observed,—

"But you haven't said you are glad to keep me, Phil."

"I don't think I need—you know."

Miss Grosvenor had finished dressing by this time; she crossed the room, laid her hands on Phillis's shoulders,—stooped and kissed her forehead; it felt hot and feverish.

"You don't look well!" she exclaimed. "You are pale, only just two tiny red spots burning in your cheeks."

"I'm a little tired, perhaps; then, too, I have been over to see Mrs Plummer again."

"The poor woman! And the funeral is to-morrow? At least it must be a little comfort to her to think that her money troubles are settled. Maurice told me that he and Denis were going to-day to see the man who holds the mortgage."

"Mr Peyton has been very kind," Phillis said.

"Oh, giving a little money is nothing," replied Georgia; but he is kind — good and generous, and thoughtful too, as few young men would be whom life has petted as it has him."

Phillis wanted no serious discussion in regard to Maurice; just at this moment she could not bear it. She roused herself, to say in her lightest bantering tone,—

"Don't wax energetic, my dear. I've no idea of disputing the youth's perfections."

"He would be out of place in this world if he were perfect."

"If we find him in danger of becoming so, we can gently chloroform him into a higher and a better sphere," interrupted Phillis.

"Oh, you inveterate joker! I am sure you laugh at him enough—you need not laugh about him."

"I can't imagine ever speaking seriously of him or to him," replied Phillis. Yet she knew her assertion lacked truth; it might have been true a fortnight back, but it was not now.

A speech like this always gratified Georgia. Having no faith in Maurice's powers of constancy,

she liked now and then to be assured by Phillis's words or manner that to her this acquaintance was merely friendly—his gallant attention only a pastime.

Yet she wondered, as she had often done, that Phillis had not been deeply attracted by this handsome, elegant creature, and again her odd remark, more than once uttered, that there was something which would keep her from loving any man, recurred to Georgia's mind. She stood leaning her hand on Phillis's shoulder, gazing absently out of the window. Her own perplexities and troubles suddenly started up, and she sighed heavily.

"You are tired too," said Phillis; "you have ridden too hard."

"Yes, I daresay," she replied. Just then, through the open casement, floated the sound of Maurice's voice, speaking to grandma. "There is that bad brother of mine," continued Georgia; "I must go down and tell him of Mrs Mayford's accident."

"But it need make no difference about his departure," said Phillis. "I don't suppose he will feel it necessary to stop and nurse the gentle widow."

"Do you want him to go?" Georgia asked, turning quickly towards her.

How Phillis longed to answer in the affirmative, but she dared not; it would be a confession of weakness which she would have died rather than utter.

"You are the goosiest goose alive!" cried she. "Am I likely to want either of you to desert us?"

Maurice put an end to the conversation by calling from the porch,—

"Do you young women mean to stop upstairs all day? A pretty way to treat a visitor! Cinders has just summoned grandma to a consultation, and here I am left like the last rose of summer, with nobody to admire my loveliness."

"Come down, Phil," said Georgia.

"Presently," she answered; "I have something to do first."

Phillis went to her own room, and Georgia descended the stairs, meeting her brother in the hall.

"What's this grandma tells me?" he asked. "The Mayford has hurt her ankle, and the aunt has to stop and take care of her?"

"Yes," Georgia said. A sudden idea seized her. Aunt Conyngham could not refuse to let her go away if Maurice insisted upon leaving and having her society.

"Well, it's hard lines on the aunt," observed Maurice, glancing up the staircase as he spoke, to see if there was no sign of Phillis.

He had had a disappointment. Knowing that Phillis was to go to Mrs Plummer's that morning, he waited down by the lake, certain she would pass that way—waited more than an hour, and then Joe Grimshaw appeared on his road to the

post-office, and informed the watchers that Miss French had already been to Mrs Plummer's and had driven home with Farmer Petherick, who found her there.

Joe mentioned the circumstance casually, as if he had no idea with what purpose the young gentleman was loitering in the wood; but though Maurice paid no attention to the remark, and only said, "Hurry up, Joe, and bring my letters and Miss Grosvenor's to the Nest," the boy perceived that he was disappointed.

"He's as fond of her as a fly is of honey. I wonder if she likes him. Folks allays said she'd marry Denis Bourke, but, hokey pokey! you can't never tell what a gall 'ull do," Joe meditated, with a reckless expenditure of negatives, and a wisdom beyond his years. "It's my opinion Miss Gros-ve-nor has ketched Bourke —but then there's the city chap! I can't seem to fix it straight noway; but them that lives will see."

Joe passed on, whistling philosophically, and Peyton followed in his wake towards the Nest.

"Maurice," said Georgia, "there is no reason why you and I should wait. Mrs Mayford would not accept my assistance, and aunt will be so occupied for a week that we shall see very little of her."

"Why, when should we go? You wouldn't want to stay alone in the town house," returned Maurice discontentedly.

"But we might make a journey in some direction."

"Oh, it is too late in the season; the weather may break up any day now. Besides, the aunt wouldn't like our deserting her; and, indeed, it wouldn't be right—just think a moment and you will see that!" said Maurice, with an access of virtuous care for others which sat as easily upon him as if such burthen had been long familiar.

Georgia could not help smiling at this exhibition of primitive Christian-like charity, yet she hated to give up her one means of escaping the perils of Denis Bourke's society and her own folly. She could not tell her brother why she wished to fly; she would have no fresh confidant. She knew that she should never change, never yield to Bourke's persistence; she should conquer—live down her foolish dream, as Mr Caruthers predicted. It was enough that she had been forced to let him participate in her secret; no other human being, not even Maurice, should share it.

"But if aunt didn't object?" she pleaded.

"She would. Even if she consented, she would feel terribly hurt. Really, Georgia, I am surprised at your thinking of leaving her," rejoined Maurice, his air of virtue increasing till it became quite majestic.

Georgia burst out laughing.

"You are too absurd!" cried she. "So you are not discouraged yet? I should think your

complete failure in trying to flirt with Phil would have worn out your patience ; you must have purchased a new stock."

" And an inexhaustible one," returned he.

He laughed, but his tone was serious enough to strike Georgia.

" Why, Maurice, if you were anybody else, I should think you in earnest ! " she exclaimed.

" Very well ; you can think I am ' anybody else,' if you like," he replied carelessly.

Grandma came out at the moment, and interrupted their conversation. She was quite talkative, for her—divided between sympathy for Mrs Mayford's misfortune, and pleasure at the thought of Miss Grosvenor's departure being deferred.

" Phillis and I hardly dared to think about it when the time for your going seemed so near," she observed.

" Ah, grandma, you have spoiled me dreadfully," answered Georgia, leading her to her favourite easy-chair in the porch, beside which stood a table, whereon her book and knitting were already placed.

" I want some of the spoiling myself ; Georgia sha'n't claim it all," said Maurice, bending over her.

The old lady looked from one face to the other, with her tender, wistful smile.

" You really are a very handsome pair," she said, " and you are very kind. Few young people would always remember an old woman as you do."

"Phillis sets too good an example for us not to follow it," said Georgia; "and then, you know, we both love you, grandma."

After a little talk, Maurice began to fidget. Finally he asked,—

"But where is Miss French?"

"She is busy; she will be down presently," replied Georgia, who, even while conversing, had been thinking of Maurice's looks and words before the old lady appeared. If he was really in earnest at last—if he loved Phillis! The thought was very pleasant to Georgia. And could Phil be brought to care? Surely, yes. Maurice always succeeded in what he set his heart upon having. Then the idea of a secret in Phillis's life recurred to Georgia, but she put it by; probably it only existed in her own fancy. Maurice and Phillis — she liked to join their names—if only Maurice could be sure of himself! But Phillis was to have consoled Denis Bourke; that had been Georgia's plan—and—

Here she became conscious that her meditations were growing foolish, and resolutely fastened her mind on the conversation.

In the meantime, Phillis was sitting in her own room, not even making a pretence of employment—sitting with her hands clasped over her knees, her head resting against the back of her chair, looking tired, worn, and exceedingly impatient.

"I wish Maurice hadn't heard what Miranda said," her reflections ran; "it will give him such

a chance to say silly things. Of course it's all folly—he doesn't care really ; it is only because he can't find that he has produced any impression on me. And the worst of it is, I care—I do ! I wouldn't have thought I could be such a fool, when I know so well that if he loved me ever so dearly, it would be no use—no use ! I didn't know I cared till the other night ; somehow what the poor child said forced me to feel it. How could I be so absurd, so idiotic, with a gulf deep as the grave between his pride and me —with—fancy my telling him ! and— "

She broke off in her reverie, and began pacing up and down the room, in a state of feverish excitement, which even her strong will could not subdue.

" Life is very hard ; there is no use in trying to disguise that fact," she thought, unable to get her reflections further away from the channel into which they had drifted than these bitter murmurs against existence. " I never did anything really wicked—why should I be punished ? Religious people say it will all be made clear hereafter ; that we shall be thankful for all our troubles here. I think that is about the weakest article of faith that theology ever bound up into its huge bundle of inconsistence ! Future happiness won't fill the blank ; besides, if we are never granted any happiness in this sphere, there is no logical reason for supposing we shall be more kindly treated in another ! Then the parsons say we must not reason—faith is what we must have—

that being the case, why did we have reason given to us? They say that in the face of our very worst trouble, and it sounds fiendish—yes, it does!"

Here she was interrupted by a tap at the door.

"Oh! who is knocking? I wish I could be let alone!" Then she called, "I can't come down yet, Georgia," supposing that Maurice had sent his sister up to fetch her.

"I ain't aweer that anybody asks you to, Miss Phillis, and 'tain't no use conversin' with no Georgia whatsumever when she ain't here," responded a voice which Phillis could not fail to recognise.

Ah! she did not object to seeing Ann Raines; she was in a silly mood, and solitude bad for her! Ann Raines represented the commonplace, work-a-day side of existence — let her enter by all means! Whether she wished to talk about the new counterpanes, or house cleaning, or whatever subject, it could not fail to be something which would put fancy and imagination to flight.

"Come in, come in," she said, hastily catching up some dress stuff that lay on the bed, and beginning to fold it, as if reflection in regard to a new gown had occupied her.

"Did you say come in?" demanded Miss Raines, evidently speaking with her mouth at the keyhole, for her voice sounded choked and difficult.

"Yes!" cried Phillis.

"Hey?" questioned Miss Raines, unintentionally exasperating. Phillis crossed the room, and opened the door with such suddenness that Miss Raines nearly fell over the threshold. "Laud's sake! I thought the side of the house had fell in!" she exclaimed.

"I had answered you twice," said Phillis, controlling her impatience, and speaking with perfect good humour.

"Wall, if it comes to that, I'd asked you twice," replied Miss Raines, recovering her equilibrium. "I didn't hear, and I don't go a pokin' my nose about till I know it's wanted. You might ha' ben a washin', or huntin' a flea, or sumpthing, for all I could tell."

"But now that you are here—you and your nose—what do you want, Ann Raines?"

"'Tain't a pooty one, and I know it; but I should look funny comin' without it," observed the spinster, putting a lean finger to the organ in question, as if to be sure it was there. "There's a great deal of *character* in noses, Miss Phillis—natur' she manages wonderfully—now you couldn't change 'em about and make any improvement in folkses faces."

"I daresay not! But what brought you, Ann?"

"Wall, I wasn't a comin'. Maria Jenkins, she's a settin' with Miss Plummner, and I'd fixed up to home, so I thought I'd walk over to Wachuset, and then when I got here, I agreed

I'd step in and see what you said about my beginning that quilt next week."

"I wish you would!" Phillis replied, going back to the bed and taking up the dress-lengths again.

"That's a very pretty blue," said Miss Raines, in the tone of a *connoisseur*, "but I like green better."

She wore a gown of the colour she admired, a shawl of various discordant tints, and a marvellous hat, with a whole bird on it, which stirred every time she moved her head, as if anxious to escape; it looked vicious too, as though inclined to bite unless allowed to carry out its desire.

"You are very gorgeous to-day, Ann," said Phillis French.

"Oh, nothin' to speak of," returned the spinster, regarding herself in the mirror with a satisfied smirk. "As I was a comin' through the hall, I see Miss Georgia and her brother on the porch with your grandma—Mr Peeton he had to stop me to joke; what a fellow he is!"

"A man who has nothing to do but amuse himself can joke very easily, I should think," said Phillis, with a sudden bitterness, growing out of her recent reflections on the unsatisfactoriness of existence to so many pilgrims.

"I expect he's awful rich," said Miss Raines: "and he's a picturful creetur' to look at, and no more stuck up 'n Miss Georgia; though when you first see 'em, abody would think the ground wasn't

good enough for 'em to walk on; but, law! they ain't a might!"

"I'm afraid you have a weakness for Mr Peyton. I shall tell your old admirer, Mr Waters," said Phillis. "And now I must go down and speak to Ninny."

"How you do tease a body!" cried Miss Raines, bridling. "Wall, I guess 'tain't hard to see who Mr Peeton likes. Laud's sake! if you'd seen how pleased he looked when I let out what Mirandy said."

The old maid stopped in dire confusion, and shrank under the stern glance Miss French fixed upon her.

"So you told Mr Peyton!" she exclaimed. "After promising me that you would not!"

"I sware to man, Miss Phillis, I would ha' cut my tongue out, I was so sorry," pleaded Ann, puckering up her face as if about to weep. "I was that upsot by poor Mirandy's dyin' I didn't know what I was about, and he asked me questions, and out that popped afore I thought."

A wave of vivid colour had swept over Phillis's cheeks, and left her paler than before.

"It is of no consequence," she said. "I was only afraid it might disturb him to hear that—"

"I didn't know what it was, and I said so; you hain't told me yit," broke in the spinster. "Anyhow, he didn't look disturbed, I can tell you."

She forgot her fear of reproof in curiosity, and nodded her head till the bird seemed alive, and

just ready to nip the end of her nose. Phillis wished devoutly that it could!

This message from the dying child would certainly be made use of by Maurice to turn their first private conversation upon serious matters; she could not bear that at present.

"When are you coming back from Wachuset, Ann?" she asked, seized with a sudden idea.

"Oh! I do know—it's a off day with me—mabby I'll step in to see Miss Winston—she 'twas Cornelly Jones, you know, and then I want to do a little trading, and, if I can, ketch a ride back towards evening."

"Stop till afternoon, and I will drive you over," said Phillis. "I want to put the store-room in order, and Cinders is too busy to help."

"Oh, wait till to-morrow," urged the spinster, disliking to relinquish her proposed holiday. "I'll do it up to the boudle for you, ef you will!"

"I mean it to be done to-day," said Phillis; "if you would rather go to Wachusel and spend money, instead of stopping here to earn some, why, you must, of course."

"But I shall spile my frock," expostulated Miss Raines, yielding a little at the thought of money, for she was parsimonious, and dearly loved to add stray shillings to her hoard.

"You've a black petticoat on," said Phillis, as the spinster lifted her gown in her energy. "Take off your dress—I will give you a jacket

to put on. I must do that store-room. Don't be disobliging, Ann. I'll pay you for a half-day's work."

"Ef I must, I must," replied the old maid, removing her hat. "Fetch in your jacket, Miss Phillis. I ain't one to run in the face o' Providence by shirkin' work. But you needn't come. I know jist how you like things. Go off to the company, and you see if I hain't got it all fixed up square by dinner-time."

"No; I want to sort my garden seeds—there is a great deal I must do myself," said Phillis.

Work—real physical work—that was the thing for her in her present mood. Was she to sit down and fold her hands, and brood and fret like a fine lady? Not a bit of it. She was Phillis French—farmer, dairy woman, boarding-house keeper. She had been indulging too much of late in idleness. If she wanted poetry, she must find it in occupation—to work, to work.

So it came about that when Maurice, losing patience, persuaded his sister to go in search of Phillis French, Georgia hunted her high and low, and at last found her with her head in a drawer of the store-room press, while Miss Raines, perched on the top of a step-ladder, was brushing the shelves which stretched across one end of the room.

"Can't stir—sha'n't have finished till dinner-time," was all the answer Georgia got to her

entreaties. "You'd better run away—you will be covered with dust."

Maurice was forced to take his departure without seeing Phillis, and when he came back in the afternoon, she had driven over to Wachuset, and taken Miss Raines with her.

However, Peyton did not allow disappointment to render him cross; he remained with grandma and Georgia, took a walk with his sister, and lingered till tea-time in the confident expectation that Phillis would presently appear. But instead, there came Joe Grimshaw, whom Maurice had sent to the town on some errand. He had seen Miss French—she had asked him to stop and tell her grandmother that she should not return till late, as Mrs Mayford desired her company; but grandma was not to feel uneasy—Ann Raines would come back with her.

CHAPTER II.

IT would not be a thing that one could promise as likely often to happen between two men aspirants for the same woman, that they should retain a sincere liking for each other, but it did occur in the case of Mr Caruthers and Denis Bourke.

Something, no doubt, was attributable to the fact that each believed in the end he should triumph, and could afford to show generosity towards his rival, but much more must be ascribed to the nobility of their characters.

The negotiations concerning the coal lands in which both were interested would have obliged them to see a good deal of each other, but so far from confining their intercourse to these business relations, they were often together, and found a mutual pleasure in cultivating the acquaintance.

They held endless discussions, drifting off into arguments upon every possible subject from ethics to metaphysics, and contriving to differ

radically in almost all things without growing acrimonious, never indeed separating after one of their wordy combats, without each feeling his respect for his antagonist increased.

Mr Caruthers still believed that Bourke's plans could only result in failure and loss of money, though he was obliged to admit that in the young man he had met that *rara avis*, a theorist capable of being practical in the attempt to reduce his ideas to useful working form.

A few days after Georgia's conversation with Mr Caruthers, the two gentlemen rode upon some business to a place a number of miles off along one of the wildest of the mountain roads. They got belated, missed their way, and a violent storm, which burst over their heads without warning, retarded them still further. Luckily they found themselves within reach of a small country inn, where they got supper, and were made sufficiently comfortable. The evening was so far advanced when the tempest ceased, and the night so dark, that they decided to remain until morning, as Bourke knew the landlord was correct in his assurances, that a torrent which crossed the road a mile below the house would be so swollen by the rain that they must go a long distance out of their course, and the probabilities were, that in the darkness they would again miss their route.

They spent a pleasant evening, however, and sat talking until late, theorising and arguing in

their usual fashion. Up to this time, there had been one thing, and one only, which showed a mutual consciousness of the peculiar relations in which they stood—any mention of Georgia Grosvenor was carefully avoided. How it happened that to-night her name gained a place in the conversation, perhaps neither could have told; but it did so, and Mr Caruthers determined to take advantage of this opportunity to establish an entire frankness between Bourke and himself—a result he had been meditating for several days.

"We have at last hit on a subject of conversation where we are not likely to disagree, at least in regard to the esteem and admiration which the lady merits," he said, with a smile.

"Well, no, there could not well be two opinions concerning that," Denis answered, meeting the other's glance with a smile as open and good-natured as that which he received.

They smoked on in silence for a little, Mr Caruthers gazing thoughtfully into the fire, and Denis watching the wreaths of smoke that curled above his head from the pipe he smoked in preference to the Havana, choice as it was, which his companion had offered him.

At last Mr Caruthers turned towards him again, and said, with an abruptness more in keeping with Denis's usual manner than his own,—

"What are you thinking so deeply about, Bourke?"

Denis roused himself with a start; his fancies had floated off into a vague reverie, concerning which he could only have told that Georgia Grosvenor had been its object.

"Upon my word I hardly know," he said; "in fact, I believe I was not thinking at all."

"Dreaming, then," amended Mr Caruthers. "Ah, there is where your age has the advantage of mine; you can still dream, and hope to see the visions become a reality."

"I mean that some of them shall, at all events," Bourke said firmly, but without anything aggressive in his tone, though he could not help thinking his companion's words held in some way a reference to Miss Grosvenor, but he knew Caruthers too well to suspect that they were meant to be mocking or a rebuke.

"And you are a very determined man, so the intention carries a weight with it which it would not have, coming from most people," Mr Caruthers observed. "I should say you had never in your life given up anything you had set your mind on; now, frankly, am I not right?"

"I believe I never did," Bourke replied; "but that is not saying I have always succeeded."

"Ah, well, even the strongest will is not omnipotent," Caruthers said pleasantly.

"Luckily for the rest of the human race who would have to live in the same world with it," returned Bourke.

"And the persons with whom the carrying out your will brings you into opposition—do you

hate them as bitterly as is the habit of most determined people?" Mr Caruthers asked.

"I don't think I am a good hater," Bourke answered. "I am frank and blunt, and I despise underhandedness and trickery, but if a man is honest and above-board, I believe I like him the better for being able to fight his battle well."

"I agree with you; even if one is to be conquered, one likes to know that one was beaten by a worthy antagonist."

"And would feel a respect in proportion to his strength," said Bourke.

"Then come battles sometimes where the issue does not entirely depend on the prowess of the opponents," Mr Caruthers said.

"Often, no doubt, but I don't follow your thought; give me an instance, as an example of what you mean," rejoined Bourke.

"I don't know that I could offer a better than our own case—the battle that is going on between you and me," said Mr Caruthers, with perfect composure. "We are each trying to win the same woman, and each is aware of the other's intention."

"Yes," Bourke assented, wondering a little what would come next, for certainly the example which Mr Caruthers had given of his meaning was rather startling, though his listener liked the frankness it displayed.

"And the issues lie beyond the control of your will or mine," continued Mr Caruthers.

"Most decidedly."

"But I believe we are both able to hope that, whatever the personal disappointment to either, the end may be what will bring the surest chance of happiness to the lady we so highly esteem."

"Else we should show ourselves a pair of selfish brutes," said Bourke.

"Hardly so bad as that, perhaps," returned Mr Caruthers; "indeed, I rather flatter myself that we show a slight superiority to the generality of our sex in being capable of feeling as we do."

"Any way, that's a comfortable fashion of looking at the matter," said Bourke, laughing.

"Oh, I never see any reason for false modesty. A man ought to form a just estimate of his own character, and give himself the same credit for good motives that he does blame for bad ones."

"But you are able to go further, and give other people the same credit," said Bourke.

"And so are you."

"I hope so."

"Very well, then, the struggle between us assumes a different character from what it would in the case of many men," said Mr Caruthers. "I think we can regard each other without prejudice—not let our wishes interfere with our opinions."

"I am sure we can, and do," replied Bourke warmly, then in spite of himself he smiled.

"Well?" asked Mr Caruthers, who was looking at him.

"What did I smile at, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I was wondering if any other two men ever fell to discussing the special subject we have fallen on in the same way—I mean two men placed in the position towards each other in which we find ourselves."

"But don't you think it is well to do it? We have not known one another very long, but I believe we have an honest mutual liking—at least I can speak for my side."

"And I for mine," said Bourke, and they shook hands across the table which stood between them.

"I have been meaning for several days to speak," continued Mr Caruthers; it seemed to me better that we should both show ourselves as frank in regard to this matter as we do in everything else."

"You are perfectly right; there is nothing more unpleasant than to feel there is some subject that must be carefully avoided with a person whom one sees daily," Bourke answered.

"I felt certain you would look at the matter in that way, and so"—he smiled here in his gravely pensive fashion—"I determined to take advantage of my being an elderly fellow and you a young one, to speak out frankly."

"I should dispute the adjective, only it might seem as if I thought you fishing for a compliment," said Bourke.

"I am forty-two," returned Mr Caruthers, with that pensive smile still on his lips. "You

see, if we are to count by actual years, I might be Miss Grosvenor's father."

"It is no matter about the years—you are in the very prime of life—all the energy of seven-and-twenty and a matured judgment, which leaves the advantage on your side."

"Forty-two," repeated Mr Caruthers slowly. "Bourke, a man falls in love at your time of life; he glides into it at mine. I did not myself know until lately how deep my affection for Miss Grosvenor had become; it might still seem too calm a sentiment to satisfy many women in their early youth; but she used to think that anything beyond esteem would be unsuited to her character and wishes."

"I think," said Bourke, "that clever as she is, she knows very little about herself as yet."

"Very little," Mr Caruthers echoed. After a pause, he added, "Do you know what has taken place between us since I came here?"

"No."

"Then I will tell you. I mean everything to be clearly understood between us. I consider it only justice to her."

"I fancy your ideas of justice involve a good deal of generosity," said Bourke. "Go on; I am listening."

"I had asked her months ago to marry me; she was to reflect and give me an answer this autumn; but that you knew."

"Yes; I knew that."

"Well, she gave me my answer not very long since."

Bourke's heart sank. The man spoke so calmly, in a tone so free from disappointment, that in spite of what he had said before, Denis could not help a quick fear.

"She told me that she could not marry me," Mr Caruthers went on, in the same slow, meditative voice.

"Then I suppose that settled the matter," cried Denis, his heart giving a second bound—but of hope and pleasure this time. Then he reflected that the words he had involuntarily uttered must sound cruel, fairly insolent, and he said quickly, "I beg your pardon; that was a brutal speech; but I did not mean it to be."

"It was a very natural one," Caruthers replied; "but you are mistaken; it did not in the least settle the matter."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Denis, staring at him with wide open eyes. Then was obliged to add once more, "Hang it, I beg your pardon again; I'm worse than a bumble-bee for blundering."

"Did not in the least settle it!" repeated Mr Caruthers. "Come, don't be astonished—take the matter home. If she refused you to-morrow, would you give in?"

"She won't hear me talk at all; at least—"

"Well, then, we are in the same predicament; for if I were to talk to her about becoming my wife, she would not listen to me either," said

Mr Caruthers. "But you don't mean to give in?"

"I do not."

"And I do not. Come, it is all out now. Rivals, but not foes?" he said inquiringly.

"Never foes, assuredly."

"Friends, I hope?"

"Friends!" and again their hands met across the table, as they looked steadily into each other's eyes.

"Good. Whichever way it ends, the disappointed man can have the satisfaction of feeling that the woman he cared for was won by an honest man."

"I think, if any third person could have a frank answer from the lady, he would hear that she had no intention but that of leaving us to be disappointed together," observed Denis, a little gruffly, speaking from one of those sudden impulses of discouragement which will occasionally seize a man in love.

"I agree with you there," said Caruthers; "but you know that is the one point in my favour; so I regard it differently from you."

"Everything is in your favour," cried Denis; "unless—unless—"

"She finds that she really loves you," said Caruthers, finishing his sentence for him.

"It would have to go pretty deep to overbalance what she calls reason; what I call the effects of a false education," said Denis, in the same rather grumbling tone.

"That part of the subject would lead us into one of our endless arguments—away off from the point in hand," returned Mr Caruthers.

"Oh yes; we should never agree."

"Well, we have been perfectly frank; each knows just where he stands in regard to the other."

"Upon my word, Caruthers, you're a capital fellow," cried Denis enthusiastically; "I don't believe one man in a thousand would behave as you do."

"And not many would receive my explanations as you have done. Do you know, I've an idea it is getting late."

An examination of their watches proved that he was right.

"Nearly one o'clock," said Denis, "and we must start rather early."

Their bedrooms adjoined the little parlour where they sat, so they could retire to rest without disturbing anybody, though the entire stillness proved that the household had gone to bed, and did not propose to be disturbed on any terms.

The next day dawned bright and clear, and the pair rode homeward in the best possible dispositions towards each other; and certainly, if Miss Grosvenor could have heard their conversation of the preceding night, she must have decided that two more original wooers never fell to the lot of woman, and would certainly have felt sorely exasperated by the persistent determination both had so frankly admitted.

CHAPTER III.

LITTLE Miranda had been buried over a week; Mrs Mayford's ankle was getting well as fast as her impatience and imprudence would allow it to, and, in outward seeming, life passed tranquilly enough with the group of friends whose experiences I am chronicling.

Maurice Peyton could not flatter himself that he gained ground with Phillis, for if one hour he tried to hope that at least she had begun to believe in his sincerity, she never failed to destroy his illusion the next. To force her down to serious conversation grew daily more difficult; then, too, in addition to her home duties, which of late appeared unusually engrossing, she paid frequent visits to Mrs Mayford, who begged importunately for her company, declaring that nobody's talents as nurse could equal hers, and Phillis was amused by her patronising demonstrations of affection, and listened with innocent meekness to her hints against Peyton.

But a general discomfort reigned under this exterior quiet. The invalid tormented Mrs Conyngham a great deal; Mr Caruthers was by no means happy; Georgia continued in a state of constant excitement, and the days were far from peaceful to Phillis and Denis Bourke.

Only grandma remained unchanged; tranquil and sunny as the soft Indian summer weather, which showed no signs of relaxing its dominion, increasing in beauty with each fresh day.

Phillis had been one afternoon to inquire after Mrs Plummer, and when she reached Bourke's gate on her way home, she concluded to shorten her walk by passing through his grounds and taking the wood-path. She went round the house and came out by the kitchen, just in time to interrupt a difference of opinion between Miss Raines and Joe Grimshaw, which threatened to grow serious. Mistress Tabitha had hurt her wrist, and had called in the antique virgin to wash some white counterpanes, previous to their being put aside in lavender for the winter. Miss Raines having completed the lavatory process, had pressed Joe Grimshaw into service to help wring the unwieldy articles dry from the last rinsing water, and though Joe did not venture to refuse, as Bourke had told him he must assist, he considered the occupation derogatory to his masculine dignity, and proceeded to tease Miss Raines, by way of a little relief to his feelings.

Twice he dropped his end of the counterpane,

obliging Miss Raines to put it back into what she termed "the bluing tub." Her indignation was further increased by having spattered her stockings, a misfortune which she acrimoniously declared the result of an intentional "flop of the quilt" on wicked Joe's part, and though he vehemently denied the charge, the twinkle in his eyes proved that if not absolutely guilty, he was far from experiencing the remorse for the accident which Miss Raines deemed fitting.

"You're just a clumsy hugger-mugger, Joe Grimshaw!" she cried. "I never see a man, nor boy neither, that could do a thing straight."

"Wringing bed-quilts ain't work for men folks, anyhow," said Joe, "and for a female that brags about her faculty as much as you do, Miss Raines, you want more help than anybody I know."

"You little sassy upstart!" rejoined Miss Raines, very red in the face, "don't you dare to call me names agin, else I'll know the reason!"

"Why, your name is Raines, ain't it?" asked Joe innocently. "Ef you've changed you must ha' ben very secret about it, and women ain't gen'rally that, if so be they're lucky enough to ketch a husband."

"You'll ketch sumpthin' as bad if you don't look sharp, my boy," retorted Miss Raines. "A husband; I'd rather have the measles a good deal!"

"Mabby you'd find them easier to ketch, though it's rather late in the day for you to git even them," muttered Joe.

Miss Raines irately demanded what he had said, but Joe prudently declined to repeat the speech.

"The truth is, you've got so sot up by Mr Peyton's spiling, that your ruined," cried the spinster, shaking her head at him with as much energy as if it had been a missile which she proposed presently to fling at him. "You go on as you air a doin', and you'll end on the gallows, not to mention scorchin' arterwards along with Divers and all the rest of the scoffers! I see you last Sunday a playin' marbles in meetin' under the seat; and if a boy that does that ain't a gallopin' towards pardition as fast as a horse can trot, then I'm a tinker."

"Why, you wouldn't a' had me disturb folks by playing 'em on top of the seat, would you?" asked Joe with a grin. "Oh, I say, Miss Raines, do stop swabbin' that there quilt round in the water, and let's wring it out and get done."

"It have been done a'ready if you hadn't gone cuttin' up your didoes!" retorted the old maid. "Here, ketch a hold of your end now."

Joe immediately seized the tail of his coat in both hands, and inquired with much earnestness,—

"Am I a holdin' of it hard enough, Miss Raines?"

"You're an impudent little good for nothin'!"

cried the virgin. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself, sir? Take a hold of the end of that quilt quicker!"

"Ef that was what you wanted, why didn't you say so?" asked Joe, obeying with a very poor grace.

"Now, don't you spatter my ankles agin, that's all!"

"I ain't done nothin' to your ankles, and I don't want to," replied Joe. "I don't believe they're spattered anyhow; you dassent to show 'em, 'cause you know they ain't—come, now!"

This time it was Miss Raines who dropped the counterpane, making a rapid movement towards Joseph as she did so.

"You—you young Potiphar!" she exclaimed, in wrath and outraged virtue; "I'm a-goin' to do by you what your mother hain't—my dootty. You're a-goin' to git your ears boxed, Joe Grimshaw."

"I'll bet you half a dollar on that," cried Joe, retreating as she advanced, and putting the tub between her and himself. "Now, see here, Miss Raines, you was hired to wash them bed-quilts; you hain't done it very scrumptious neither; and not to go committin' salt and butter on me, and I don't mean to stand it."

At this moment Phillis appeared, and her coming somewhat quieted the belligerents, though both commenced a voluble recital of their wrongs. However, Joe speedily yielded to his admired Miss Phillis's gentle rebuke, and

even condescended to inform the spinster that he was "only pinnin'," applying himself so vigorously to his duty that her wrath was appeased, and she went so far as to admit that, "after all, she s'posed he was about as decent as any creatur' inside a male hide could be."

Phillis stood for a few moments leaning against the side of the well, and answering Miss Raines's questions in regard to Mrs Plummer. Suddenly the spinster exclaimed,—

"Oh, laud's sake! ef there don't come Mr Bourke; and here I be all drabbled, and my dress pinned up. I wish to goodness men-folks would keep away when they ain't wanted."

She seized the counterpane and ran off, calling to Joe to follow and help her spread it on the grass. Denis had come up the zigzags, and was passing through the garden; he saw Phillis, and turned towards the kitchen, saying as he approached,—

"I have been down to your house; nobody knew what had become of you."

"What did you want?" she asked, rather wearily, though her face lighted up with a friendly smile.

"Only to tell Mr Sykes I had got those seeds from the patent office," he explained. He was close beside her now, and added, as he looked anxiously in her face, "You look tired, Phillis."

"Yes, I believe I am," she replied. "Somehow I have been tired for a whole week, and that's unusual with me, you know."

"Come and sit down in the verandah," he said.

"I suppose I ought to be getting home," she answered; "I've a dozen things to do."

"Well, your arrival is expected impatiently enough," he said. "I left Maurice at your house, and very much injured his lordship seemed to feel because you were absent, as he always does, if he can't get everything he wants in this world."

"Why, he drove Georgia over to Wachuset. Has she come back?"

"No; she stops till evening; but Maurice said she and the aunt were busy with the invalid, so he decided to return and go for his sister later."

Phillis appeared to have changed her mind about the necessity for hastening home. She seated herself in the verandah, picked up some knitting which Mistress Tabitha had left there, and began to add to the round of the half-finished stocking.

"I wonder if you could sit idle a moment, Phillis," said Bourke.

"Ah, you and I mustn't allow the society of our fine new friends to make us forget that we belong to the working-class," she answered, smiling, yet her voice was rather bitter.

"That speech doesn't sound like you, P. French!" returned Denis; but though he smiled too his voice grew grave.

"No, and it was silly!" she said. "Heigho! I'm stupid to-day."

"I'm afraid you are not very well," he replied.

"Oh, I'm well enough. The truth is, Denis, I've been going about for a week oppressed by a sort of presentiment—you know I'm not given to such folly!"

"No, indeed! But it is very uncalled for now, Phillis; the last letter we got proved that you could put by your anxiety, and it is exactly a week since it came."

"Yet, somehow, I cannot get over the feeling! Of course it means nothing; one never has a warning when trouble is really near; that is just the time one is sure to be in the highest spirits."

"Very often," he said, while his face showed that he was thinking of something else, though the solicitude with which he regarded her, proved that she was the object of his thoughts.

"Don't look at me like that, Denis!" she exclaimed, trying to laugh, though her lips quivered. "I feel as Georgia says she does sometimes when she is nervous—as if I should like to cry! There's nothing the matter, and you ought to scold me instead of looking sorry."

"It would require a very stern judge even to do that with you," he replied. "Phillis, I often wonder if you have the least idea what a brave woman you are—what a lesson of fortitude and patience your life is!"

"I don't feel very brave lately," she said, with the tremor of repressed tears in her voice. But her habits of self-control were too firmly fixed

for her to yield further to the unusual weakness, and after a moment's pause she lifted her head and continued cheerfully, "Let us talk about something else; one can't help feeling a little tired and cowardly sometimes, but to dwell upon such thoughts and discuss them, is only another way of petting the folly."

"You are the softest woman to other people, and the severest to yourself that ever lived, I think," he said.

"Life has made it necessary for me to be stern with P. French," she replied, gazing steadily at him; "at present she needs an extra share of sternness."

"Oh, I hope not!" he exclaimed, then paused, hardly venturing to put in words the meaning which her speech took in his mind. Phillis knitted on in silence, and after a pause he said, "It is a long while since we have had one of our old talks."

"It is a long while since anything has been as it used to be," she answered. "But it has been a very happy summer in many ways, Phillis."

"Perhaps too happy," she said. "Oh, Denis, I wonder if we shall have to live to regret that Georgia ever came here."

"Not I," he replied. "Whatever comes, I shall never be sorry."

"But oh, Denis, it seems hoping against hope when one remembers her bringing up! She's a grand creature, but the shackles that hold her

are very strong. You don't mind my saying this—we haven't talked about it—but you must know I see just where you stand."

"Of course," he answered. "Phillis, this is the way I feel. You know when I have made up my mind that a thing is right, I go on, I pay no attention to possible consequences. I am doing that now; if the world and Georgia's false education prove too strong for me, then I must bear my burthen; but I cannot call my heart back—I would not if I could."

"She will have to decide for or against before long," said Phillis. "She cannot endure this strain—it is telling very severely on her. I only wonder how her aunt can be so blind to what is going on. As for her brother—well, I know he does see, but you might as well expect a butterfly to think seriously as to look for reflection in Maurice Peyton."

Bourke hesitated an instant, then said,—

"I used to think so, Phillis, but I begin to perceive that I have underrated Maurice; he has more fixedness of purpose than I gave him credit for."

"Oh, he might show it for a time, when some caprice got possession of him," she replied almost sharply. "He is like a spoiled child—always wanting the moon because it is out of reach; let him get it, and he'd fling it away like a foot-ball half-an-hour after."

"No, no! A month ago I might have agreed

with you, but I have learned his character better —that is not just."

"Well, I know it is not, and that is exactly what makes me so savage and bitter!" she exclaimed, dropping her work, and looking at him with half-frightened eyes. "I tried to believe it as long as I could, but that night little Miranda died I had to be convinced."

"Yes, he told me," Bourke answered; "he never had talked freely to me before, but he was so excited he could not keep silence. Not that he knows you are convinced at last; he is in earnest; he has grown so humble, poor fellow, that he scarcely dares hope."

"And he never shall know!" cried Phillis firmly, though her voice began to tremble again as she added, "oh, I wish he would go away! I am tired—I want to rest—I wish he would go."

"I suppose he must," Bourke said sadly. "I'm afraid there is nothing else to be done; and yet—he is so different in many ways from what I knew, or he either—he has developed so many new, sterling qualities since his whole soul has got awake, that sometimes I wonder—"

"Denis, you must be mad!" she broke in passionately. "Admit that he loves me!"

"And he does, Phillis. I never saw love work so radical a change in a man."

"No radical change; the leopard can't lose his spots!" she cried, with a strange mingling of bitterness, terror, and pain in her tones. "There is one thing stronger than his heart—

his pride. Why, you know as well as I do that if I were to tell him the truth, he would go away to the ends of the earth rather than see me again. His love would seem such a shame to him, that if he had ten hearts he would break them all rather than give that love an instant's shelter."

"I—I am afraid so," Bourke said. "All the fault of his bringing up. Oh, it is terrible to see the effect of false education and the damnable doctrines of what people call the world on two such natures as his and Georgia's! But she is less hurt than she believes; it may be so with him, Phillis."

"Whether it be or not, you and I will never have the opportunity of finding out," she answered sternly.

"You mean you would never give him the chance of proving whether he was really superior to the wrong influences of his life—the belittling, pernicious effects of his pride?"

"Of course I mean that. While a doubt remains that his pride would conquer, do you think I would tell him a word—give him a chance to decide—I? No, no, Denis, never! He may stay or he may go, but he will never have an opportunity to pity P. French."

"And yet—and yet—oh, you may be wronging him, Phillis! He is so different from what we thought; he might bear even that test."

"He will never be called on to do so," she answered, her voice suddenly growing quiet and low, sounding the more inflexible from that very

gentleness. "Neither he nor any man, Denis; my secret and I are married to each other; there's no place for love to find lodging. If ever I had a heart to give—I mean as women give theirs to men—my secret filled it up long ago."

Bourke stood regarding her with a troubled countenance, full of tenderness and yearning sympathy—longing to speak, yet unable to find a word which would not carry a sting instead of the comfort he wanted to offer. His back was turned towards the garden, but Phillis, looking out across the brow of the hill, said suddenly,—

"Mr Peyton is coming."

"Has he seen you? Do you want to get away?" Denis asked, fearful that to meet Maurice just now would be too hard a trial even for her wonderful strength.

She glanced at him with a proud smile.

"P. French is like the Old Guard—she never surrenders!" was her answer. She sat calmly awaiting Maurice's approach, and as he reached the verandah, said gaily,—"When a lady comes to visit you, Mr Peyton, it would be more polite to stop at home to receive her! Suppose we all three drive over to Wachuset and release Georgia! Denis Bourke looks rather like a dragon-killer to-day, and you can serve as troubadour, and chant his triumphs after he has rescued the damsel."

Her suggestion of driving to the town was carried into effect, and never had Denis seen her gayer, or Maurice found her more bewitchingly

impervious to sentiment, and though in too high spirits to despond, he could not help again telling himself that it was useless to hope he had made any perceptible progress in his great work—Phillis French still eluded him, "and passed on, in maiden meditation fancy free."

CHAPTER IV.

THAT night there was a men's dinner given by one of the directors of the coal company, to which even Maurice condescended to go. Georgia and Phillis French had another quiet evening, and Miss Grosvenor was forced to admit that, during the last few days, fate had kindly interposed in various ways to afford her a good deal of time for rest, if only she had been sensible enough to take advantage of it. But rest she could not—come to any clear decision she could not. She believed she meant to crush all hope in Denis Bourke's mind as effectually as she trusted she had done in that of Mr Caruthers, but the importunacy of her pretty dream militated sadly against all efforts. She still called it a dream—an impossible romance—but it was very, very sweet; and when she struggled against its potency her heart ached and cried out dolorously, to prove that it held its part therein. No girlish fancy had ever before found a place in her soul, and this newness increased the charm, bitterly as she upbraided

the folly of indulging after girlhood in romantic fancies, fitting at sixteen, and which, when they came then, died a natural death before the strong light of reality, and left no pain behind.

All the while, she knew she was cheating herself—she knew that she loved this man, with whom she had been thrown into such familiar intercourse during the past long, pleasant months; but she would not yield to the belief that she was capable of love in its full significance, of the mighty power which transforms the whole character and renders sacrifice for the object beloved, a blessed boon. The next morning Georgia went as usual to visit her aunt, and saw Mr Caruthers. They had a cheerful conversation, undisturbed by any approach to topics which could have troubled her, and when she got back to the Nest late in the afternoon there was Denis Bourke waiting for her in one of his most conversational moods, building up beautiful theories which she combatted with all her might, declaring them fit only for the millenium, if ever that apocryphal season should arrive.

"The carrying them out among men would help forward the millenium," Bourke persisted.

"On the whole," said Georgia, "I don't think I should enjoy that perfect peace and quiet—it would be stagnation."

"It would be action and work in their highest and noblest form," returned Denis.

"I don't think I am capable of appreciating anything when it gets so terribly sublimated,"

Georgia averred. "I am of the earth, earthy. I can understand when anybody talks to me about wanting wealth and honours, but the general brotherhood doctrine is beyond me. I couldn't even go far enough therein to be willing to let another woman have as pretty a gown as myself."

"You are not speaking from your soul," cried Denis hotly.

"Well, I am from my vanity, and that is much more powerful," retorted she.

"It is wrong—it is unworthy to talk so!"

"In your opinion, you mean."

"There they go, full tilt!" cried Phillis French, clapping her hands in delight. "Now listen, and improve your mind, Mr Peyton."

Maurice was lying lazily at full length on the turf, while the rest sat respectably in comfortable easy-chairs.

"It may be a discussion of fine theories," he said, brushing away a handful of dandelion blossoms which Phillis flung over his face; "but if you and I were to talk in that way, Miss French, I am inclined to think these philosophers would call it uncommonly like quarrelling."

"Well," said Phillis, "it has one merit their conversation don't often possess—I can comprehend what they mean; and when they get to Comte and the rest of their fellow geniuses, I am lost—drowned—despairing."

"If you'll come out into the garden, I'll read De Musset to you, and we'll forget them and

their wisdom," urged Maurice, always on the watch for pretexts to get her society to himself.

"I'm not going to listen to De Musset any more," replied Phillis. "I mentioned him only yesterday to Mrs Mayford, and she declared that no proper behaved young woman would ever dream of admitting his acquaintance."

"Did you tell her she was a cadaverous donkey?"

"I couldn't, for I'd never heard of one! But I laid the blame of my knowledge on you."

"And she said?"

"That it was just what she should have expected of you," cooed Phillis French. "She gave me a long lecture on my duty—in the danger of being deluded by a man in a position above mine—"

"Phil, she did not dare!" broke in Georgia indignantly.

"Indeed, she did," returned Phillis French, with one of her little ecstatic shakes. "She said —but very politely—that I must not forget who and what I was, though destiny had kindly permitted me to associate for a little with ladies and gentlemen—"

"Nonsense! You are making it up!" growled Maurice.

"No; she did not consider it a kindness—she was afraid it might prove a misfortune," pursued Phillis; "bring me great unhappiness, unless I wisely followed her advice. She said the lady's

friendship for me would prove only a caprice—that was you, G. G. !"

"There never was so vulgar, detestable a woman !" cried Georgia.

"She said the gentleman wanted to break a country heart before he went to town—that was you, Mr P. !" continued Phillis, saluting Peyton with a fresh shower of dandelions.

"She's not very wise if she has failed to discover that you have none," retorted Maurice.

"She said I had better be humble and meek, and beg a certain young man who appeared to belong to my own rank—for she believed none of the absurd stories about his birth—to marry me —that young man was you, Master Denis—are you ready ?"

"Oh, she hates Denis worse than she does me," said Maurice, "for when she first came she wanted to flirt with him, when she could spare time from persecuting poor Caruthers, and the boy was so dull that he did not even perceive her drift."

"If a man may not marry his grandmother, it must be equally against the canon to flirt with her," said Denis.

"Not bad for the Irishman !" cried Phillis. "You are improving — backwards — I never before heard you say a harsh word of any woman."

"I never met one so thoroughly antipathetic to me," he answered.

"But don't let me disturb transcendentalism !" cried Phillis. "Go back to your strife, good

people—I am only sorry I can't stop to listen, but I must see what Ninny means to give us for supper."

"I've got a new pipe for the kitchen high priestess, so I'll go with you," Maurice said, rising.

"I can take it, and save you the trouble."

"I cannot trust you—you would delude her into the belief that it was a tender attention on your own part," he answered.

So the pair went off, and left Georgia and Bourke to their own devices. Miss Grosvenor, anxious to keep the conversation on safe grounds, immediately began volubly upon their often-repeated arguments, and he bore his part. Still these talks had changed in character; and Georgia had to feel as she had several times done lately, that they were no longer general discussions upon his theories, but held particular significances which applied to their own case.

And the theories possessed too a constantly growing attraction for her—they were noble, they were vast, yet every detail, every minutiæ had its proper place, and gave them a practical look which staggered her, even while combating and refusing to admit their truth.

To-day she felt the spell more strongly than ever; common aims appeared so sordid and petty in comparison; her own cynically-expressed views sounded so hard and unwomanly; existence, as he painted it, appeared in a completeness such as it cannot attain under the pressure of ordinary

ambitions; till at length she almost ceased to argue, and let him talk on. He watched her mobile face deepen in earnestness, her beautiful eyes glow, and suddenly cried out,—

"Ah, now you are your real self! A while ago, when you were trying to be cynical and unbelieving, it was not you—it was just that Miss Grosvenor putting all sorts of worldly sophistries and false creeds that were worn threadbare long since, into your mouth."

"I am afraid it would be difficult to separate that unpleasant young person from me," she answered.

"Not a bit of it!" he exclaimed confidently; "you are growing away from her every day! You don't like her; you don't believe in her; you have not for a good while, though you had been so carefully taught to consider her your real self, that naturally it took time to discover the truth."

"I am obliged to confess that candour compels me to decline your compliment," she said.

"It was not a compliment—a simple statement of a fact which must be patent to anybody who knows you well."

"Then I fear that I cannot take rank among my own intimate acquaintances," returned she.

"Of course you cannot!" he said, in a tone which expressed surprise at her even having dreamed of so doing. "We agreed some time since that you did not in the least know yourself."

"As well as I recollect, that was only an assertion of yours. I don't think I claimed any share in it," she answered, unable to repress a smile, though she tried to look indifferent, and even a little scornful.

"But it is true, you know!"

"Really, Mr Bourke, you are a singularly persistent person! Metaphorically, you thrust your opinions upon one at the point of the bayonet," cried she.

"Ah, well, you know it is only the use of the other kind of bayonet that I object to," he said, laughingly.

"I am not sure that the moral or metaphysical one, or whatever the correct name would be, is not sometimes quite as unpleasant," she retorted. "You insist on my believing things that I don't believe, in the most extraordinary fashion."

"No, no; I only try to convince you that you make a mistake in supposing you do not believe them."

"It comes to pretty much the same thing, after all! But I assure you I am not to be convinced that my opinions are the exact opposite of what I consider them."

"You will gradually convince Miss Grosvenor though," said he, with an exasperating smile.

"Suppose we stop splitting straws, and talk of something else," returned she, with a shade of stateliness which he disregarded completely.

"So we will!" he cried. "Why, I have

scarcely seen you since Mr Caruthers and I got lost the other night."

"I am glad to find that no harm happened to such an interesting pair of babes in the wood," quoth she, sarcastically.

"Harm? A good deal of good, on the contrary."

"Oh, indeed!"

"We were very good friends before, but we got to know each other better than ever," cried Denis, in his eager, headlong fashion.

"I trust the improved knowledge was satisfactory to both," she replied, in the same tone of cool raillery, though inwardly she felt far from cool, and was wondering what he meant.

"It certainly was to me," Denis said, "and he was good enough to admit the same on his part."

"Then, altogether, your getting lost proved fortunate. I should advise you to repeat the experiment."

"I don't know if Caruthers would agree to that," said Bourke, laughing. "Old Mrs Mosely gave us a very decent supper, only, unfortunately, she had no bread in the house, and we had to take hot buckwheat cakes in their place. However, Caruthers ate them, like a soldier, though he hates the abominations."

"You must go about provided with a loaf of bread for his benefit when you make expeditions," said Georgia.

"He's a capital fellow—a splendid fellow!" cried Bourke.

"There I agree with you most decidedly."

"Of course you do,—any rational creature must. Oh, and how right you were not to put off telling him! I knew you would do it—you are so good and frank. I—"

"Pray, how do you know that I did?" she interrupted, too much surprised by his knowledge, even to pretend ignorance of his meaning.

"Why, he told me, of course."

"He told you!"

"Yes; and we both praised and admired you in a way that ought to have made your ears burn, if there were any truth in the old proverb."

"Certainly a most extraordinary confidence for one man to make another," she said stiffly.

"Oh, we made each other several," returned Bourke, quite at his ease. "I'll repeat you one of mine."

"Excuse me," said she; "I have no wish to intrude upon any matters that may be private between Mr Caruthers and you."

"Not at all private—at least where you are concerned. Indeed, you ought to be told," he answered, in the same cheerful way.

"I think I don't want to hear," she cried hastily.

But he went on unheeding, though now his face and voice grew more earnest.

"I told him I loved you, and that I hoped some day to persuade you to like me a little."

"I can imagine no confidence more superflu-

ous, except the one he made you," said Georgia.

"He had seen it for himself, so that, in fact, all I did was to admit he was right," said Bourke.

"Permit me to say," retorted Georgia, "that I think you both behaved in the most—the most—well, to use no stronger term—in a very remarkable fashion, and I shall tell Mr Caruthers what I think, as plainly as I do you."

"No, you won't," said Bourke; "you'll be as gentle as possible with him, and spend your wrath on me; but I don't mind, because that only shows you like me best."

"I do not! Mr Caruthers is the dearest friend I possess among your very troublesome sex."

"Friend—yes! And he is worthy of being; but you can't put me off with a place among your friends."

"I think I will relegate you to the list of acquaintances."

"Too late—oh! Georgia, Georgia!"

"I wish you would drop that habit of calling me by my Christian name! You did it the other night before my aunt; luckily she did not happen to notice, else she would have overwhelmed me with her indignation,—very rightly, too, for that matter."

"But she must know, sooner or later; you might as well accustom her to it by degrees," said he.

"I think not, as I have just asked you to give

up the habit," she replied, though her heightened colour showed that she understood perfectly what he meant.

"Oh! the calling you by your name? well, I'll be careful only to do it when we are alone! But she must know sooner or later that I am trying to persuade you to take mine."

"I hope it will prove unnecessary, because I trust you mean to be sensible enough to give up all that folly."

"After you have admitted that you care for me!" cried he. "What do you take me for? a stock—a stone? You care—you admitted it—you care!"

"It was just a midsummer madness, then—"

"Stop, stop! It is not right to jest,—it is not fair either to yourself or me, Georgia."

"Then I will not," she answered. "Come, I am ready to speak as seriously as you could wish, and I want you to listen. We are in a false position for the time, Mr Bourke—more by my fault than yours, I own—but it must end."

"It will, when you listen to both our hearts and consent to marry me," he said, bending forward and looking full into her eyes with that glance at once tender, pleading, yet so strong and masterful, which affected her so deeply, in spite of every effort she could make to exert her will. "It can only end in that way, Georgia—only that!"

"Denis Bourke, I do think you are mad!"

she exclaimed, "Let us suppose—only it is difficult—that I were equally so! On what would we marry?"

But carelessly as she tried to speak, as if regarding his words as only partially earnest, she could not help hesitating over the closing word of her sentence, and blushing as she did so.

"We should marry on what all people ought —love!"

"I have not gone so far!"

"But when you do!" he cried. "Love

> 'In a hut, with water and a crust,
> Is, Lord forgive us, cinders ashes and dust,'"

she quoted, with a sarcasm which hurt her, but seemed to produce no effect upon him, for he rejoined,—

"On that, and the very comfortable income we should have between us."

"Mine barely serves to pay my dressmaker."

"And mine will do the rest."

"Would or could, I suppose you mean."

He considered a moment, still studying her with that soft, masterful glance.

"No," he said gently, yet in a voice which, low as it was, rang out firm as steel; "I meant will!"

She was afraid of herself and him; she could not sit there and prolong the conversation, which she knew would grow more and more earnest. She dreaded being urged to some admission which might give him a further advantage, and

now every inch of ground was precious; she felt like a person on the sands, watching the tide rise higher and higher.

It was not dignified to take refuge in flight, though the only device she could hit upon, and of late she had too often shown herself incapable of maintaining the dignity and presence of mind which she used to think could never desert her under any circumstances, to stand upon ceremony with her own scruples.

She rose, and murmuring some unintelligible apology, walked into the house; he rose too, but neither called after her nor attempted to follow.

By the time she reached the foot of the stairs, she recollected that no move could have been more unwise; much better to have sat still and, say what he would, intrench herself in the assertion that all such talk was folly. Running away became a tacit admission of fear; matters had gone too far between them for any hope that he might deem her offended. He would know she dared not listen to his pleadings, because their was a traitor in her own camp; knew that her heart pleaded his cause with a mute eloquence stronger than any passionate words of his.

As she paused for an instant, she heard Phillis and Maurice come along the gravelled walk—heard the former say,—

"Where is Georgia, Denis Bourke?"

"She has gone upstairs," he answered, "but she will be back in a few moments."

She went softly on, and shut herself in her room, well aware she should not be allowed to remain, though she would have liked to punish the easy assurance of Bourke's information regarding her, by not appearing again. But this was impossible, for the others would think her ill, or that something unpleasant had occurred, and she should be troubled with questions too difficult to answer.

She kept to her solitude till she got her cheeks cool, and could behave as usual, then descended, and the evening passed quietly enough, varied by a visit from Aunt Conyngham, who had driven over with Mr Caruthers for a little air and rest, after a day with her troublesome invalid. But they all knew that Aunt Conyngham rather enjoyed being a martyr to duty now and then, so no great amount of sympathy was required; words she must have—she wanted to know that her sacrifices were duly appreciated by everybody about.

CHAPTER V.

THE days slipped by, and now with an inconsistency for which she bitterly reproached herself, Georgia began to regret their swift flight. She hated the thought of going back to her vapid life with its round of monotonous pleasure—it was like changing the free air of heaven for an overheated room.

Denis Bourke was fighting his battle, and fighting it well, and Georgia's only aid against him and her heart lay in Mr Caruthers's counsels, for her own reasonings had been gone over and over so frequently that she had ended, as many people in this generation have done with their religious creeds—studied them so carefully in order to display their chief points of strength, that they discover the widest flaws and deepest lack just where they had expected the foundation to be most secure.

Fortunately for Mrs Conyngham's peace of mind, she had no suspicion of what had taken place between her niece and Mr Caruthers. The

terms upon which they stood appeared to her to offer every assurance, that all would end as it ought. They were together a good deal, almost daily ; when Georgia came to pay her visit, she was able when she went to sit with her patient, to leave them in her little salon, and she knew that had matters not been going well, Georgia would have avoided these *tête-à-têtes.* She only marvelled as time passed, that Mr Caruthers did not come to tell her that everything was definitely settled, and at length grew too impatient to bear suspense any longer. So now, as she did not deem it exactly prudent to question Georgia, and Maurice declared his entire ignorance, she determined to speak to Mr Caruthers —at least he ought to be frank with her who had always stood his friend.

He afforded her the desired opportunity unintentionally one day, by entering her salon in the hope of finding Miss Grosvenor there.

"No Georgia this morning," Mrs Conyngham said ; "I got a little note from her—she will be over this afternoon, however."

"She is not indisposed, I trust?" he said, in a disappointed tone.

"Oh no, no! Some accident has happened in one of the poor families she interests herself in, and she and Miss French have gone to see about the child. Georgia is always kindness itself—she can't bear to know that anybody suffers."

Mr Caruthers was quite prepared to assent,

as to any other virtue which might be ascribed to the young lady, though, had Georgia heard her aunt's speech, she would have frankly said that, until the last few months, it never would have occurred to her to take any personal trouble for the relieving of distress. She would have given as much money as she could, and tried to put the affliction out of her mind, because she hated to think of suffering; but voluntarily to witness it, be of personal assistance—that would have seemed to her impossible, until this season in which she had learned so many lessons from Phillis and Denis Bourke.

Mr Caruthers began to ask after the invalid, to converse upon indifferent subjects, instead of eagerly fastening upon the opportunity of talking about Miss Grosvenor, as he would have done a few months before. Mrs Conyngham noticed this change in him, as she had frequently of late, and it nettled her. She tried to get back to a discussion of that young lady, but twice he circumvented her, thereby rousing her spirit; not that she put it so in her mind; she told herself it was her duty to know just how matters were going, and his duty to tell her, and duty must be fulfilled!

Nothing she detested so much as abruptness —she always liked to lead airily up to a topic— have its appearance seem the natural result of conversation. As a rule, she would as soon have thought of pulling a friend out of bed, as brusquely to seize hold of a theme and drag

it forcibly forward. But she was obliged to do so now—speak he must and should, and her irritation at having to violate one of her rules for the guidance of polite mortals, rendered her playful tone an effort, not sharp, but somewhat less mellifluous than usual, as she said,—

"Forgive me, but have not you and Georgia grown a little mysterious lately?"

"Mysterious?" he repeated with a certain guilty sensation which he feared must hinder his interrogation appearing one of simple surprise.

"You certainly have—since you oblige me to answer my own question," she said with a forced smile. "Now, Georgia has always been somewhat inclined that way, but it is a new phase on your part."

"I assure you I have no mysteries," returned he, wishing helplessly that he could find some excuse and escape. She meant, he saw, to commence troublesome inquiries, and he was mortally afraid that she might draw from him some admission which would bring annoyance on Georgia. Yet if he avoided the matter, or gave unsatisfactory answers, he should rouse suspicion in her mind, and that would be worse than anything.

"I am very glad to hear it," she said; "certainly it would not be like you."

He bowed his thanks for the compliment, but Aunt Conyngham did not propose to rest content with mere signs of polite gratitude. He remained

silent too, instead of saying something which might still allow her to usher in her subject with due ceremony, and much as this reticence vexed her, vexation was not so strong as distaste at the necessity for abruptness. But since he refused to aid, the pulling-out-of-bed process must take place, and it had better be accomplished without further delay.

"Then if you have no mysteries, tell me exactly how you and Georgia stand," said she, shivering to hear that excitement had sent her voice up at least half a tone higher than she could wish.

"How we stand?" he echoed, before he knew what he was saying.

"Precisely! Are matters settled yet? Do you go to Europe?" she demanded, and now her voice went a little too low, and sounded fairly stern and inquisitorial—should she never hit the just medium!

Her last question was luckily one he could easily answer—he could frame it too in a somewhat Jesuitical fashion.

"All thought of that will have to be put off for the time," he said. "We have talked—Miss Grosvenor and I—of the appointment—the offer, I mean—but I shall decline it."

"So Georgia has changed her mind about wanting to spend a few years abroad?" said Aunt Conyngham. "Personally, of course I am very glad! No place suits me now-a-days like New York or Newport, but I dread losing her

society too much to have stayed behind—yes, indeed, I am greatly pleased."

Her satisfaction was increased by the consciousness that at length she had got her voice back to the soft, monotonous tone which her goddess etiquette required.

"Oh, the air of Newport suits you admirably," said Mr Caruthers, with quite an eager appearance of interest in what concerned her health. "And when you have made these alterations in your cottage that you propose, the house will be delightful."

"A very comfortable little nest," she replied, bound by the laws of her inexorable duty to pause long enough to notice his remark, though she hated to lose time now that she had got her subject out of bed, and even been able to throw a little drapery of smiles over it. Sybil Mayford might summon her, or Maurice might come in, and have her old claims to Mr Caruthers's entire confidence re-established, she must and would. "I want to consult you about the plans for the house—that can be done another time—let us speak a little of Georgia and you, now that we have a quiet moment."

"Yes," said Mr Caruthers; and never did assent sound more like a negative; but Aunt Conyngham had grown too eager to heed.

"I suppose she has not positively consented, else you would have told me; but you are quite certain—you feel satisfied?"

"I am very glad that I came here," he

answered. "Miss Grosvenor and I understand each other better than we ever did; I think she likes me better, too."

"I am sure of it!" cried Aunt Conyngham, with her brightest smile.

"As for my interest, my devotion, my desire for her happiness—you know what that is," he continued, regaining hope that he might still avoid absolutely dangerous questions.

"Of course I do, my dear friend. And she—well, it is not an admission I would make to any other man in the world in regard to a young lady—but she is a good deal changed of late—softer, gentler. Ah, I foresaw that your patience and your devotion would produce its due effect at length."

Her words stabbed sharply; for Mr Caruthers knew to what that change in Georgia was attributable. To hear it mentioned by another caused him a pang of despondency—a quick dread that the sentiment in the girl's mind was something deeper than the mere dream he and she had agreed to consider it.

"She is very nervous still—has not got her strength back as could be wished; we must all be careful not to excite or trouble her," he said, partly to give himself a reason for the alteration in Georgia partly as a warning to Aunt Conyngham.

"And that has made me refrain from saying a word to her; but you and I need not be so reticent. There has never been any hesitation between us about speaking freely."

"None," he answered, with a sudden, deep regret.

But he did not add another word; and his listener's satisfaction began to fade somewhat—not so much from a fear that matters were in a less advanced state than she had hoped, as from irritation because he would force her to ask point-blank for information.

"Then, I suppose, when we return to town, her decision will be announced, and prove what we wish?"

"Eventually, I trust," he replied, with a doleful sinking at his heart, caused in a measure by a dread that his evasive reply might rouse Mrs Conyngham's suspicions, but still more by the pang her reference to the alteration in her niece had occasioned him.

"Eventually!" murmured Aunt Conyngham, in a tone of dismay, flung rudely down from the realms of hope, in which she had been basking. "Why, the six months are up!"

"My dear friend, I must have patience, even if another six months are requisite," he rejoined, as she paused, trying to console himself by the recollection of what he trusted that period would do towards dispelling Georgia's dream, and restoring her to the calm state of mind and judgment so desirable.

"Actually asks for six months more!" Aunt Conyngham fairly groaned. "But you must be firm—you must insist!"

"Forgive me, my dear lady, I can insist upon nothing."

Aunt Conyngham drew herself up; she looked portentously dignified and majestic.

"Then I must speak seriously to my niece," she said. "I cannot permit her to risk comment by such indecision; it is a wrong to herself and you, which must not be tolerated."

"I assure you, Mrs Conyngham, that you will only do harm."

"You must permit me to judge."

"I cannot, since my interests are vitally involved," he said. "One thing is certain—any interference at this juncture will only endanger still further—I mean, will be prejudicial to my cause—fatally so, perhaps."

She quickly let him perceive how unfortunate he had been in his choice of expression.

"What juncture?—what do you mean? What has happened that you should use that word?" she asked.

"At this time, I should have said."

"But why? What has occurred?"

"As we were just saying, she is not strong; she—"

"Mr Caruthers, you are keeping something back from me!" cried Aunt Conyngham, so far forgetting herself as positively to interrupt him—a lapse which almost constituted a crime in her eyes. She recalled certain ill-natured speeches of Sybil Mayford's—sneering inuendoes, which implied a belief that Georgia had indulged in a

flirtation with Denis Bourke. The wicked creature had repeated these to Mr Caruthers; they had troubled him, and this was at the bottom of his reticence—his ambiguous form of speech! She must learn if her suspicion were correct, and set him at his ease. She hurried on before he could manage a response—"In town, in society, where she met people, you might have some cause to be disturbed occasionally; but here, of course, no complication could arise. For that matter, Georgia is no flirt. I am sure you would never for an instant listen to that absurd, heartless Sybil. After all my sacrifices for her, she actually attempted to say that Georgia was flirting with Denis Bourke!"

In spite of his self-control, a wave of vivid colour rushed up to Mr Caruthers's forehead, faded, and left him pale from the contrast.

"Miss Grosvenor would never condescend to flirt with any man," he said. "Let me entreat you not to mention Mrs Mayford's coarse calumny to her."

Before Aunt Conyngham could recover herself sufficiently, to attempt any effort to discover the meaning of his agitation, there came a knock at the door.

"Only Rosalie," said she. "Come in—do."

Phillis French and Maurice appeared on the threshold.

"The invitation sounded mightily like stay out!" cried Maurice gaily. "Good morning,

most delightful of aunties ; Miss French and I have come to make you a visit."

Mrs Conyngham had to compose herself and greet Phillis with cordiality, but the pair could not have arrived more inopportunely. Phillis French looked distractingly pretty in her fresh blue and grey costume, and Maurice's admiring eyes dwell too frankly upon her, not to increase the difficulty the aunt found in preserving the complete suavity of her manners.

"Where is Georgia?" she asked, as soon as the greetings had been exchanged, and Phillis had annoyed her and Mr Caruthers also, by giving him a flower out of the bouquet she had brought, and insisting on his putting it in his button-hole. "I thought, Miss French, that you and she were occupied."

"We were," said Phillis, calm as a May morning, "but this graceless nephew of yours and Denis Bourke invaded us, and insisted on our taking a drive."

"Oh, my niece is with you, then? Did she go to Mrs Mayford's room?"

"No, no ; she did not come after all."

"I think I don't quite understand your explanation," said Aunt Conyngham with a frigid smile.

"We don't understand either," said Phillis with malicious glee. "However, she has grandma and Mr Bourke to entertain her. I came because I had promised to bring your friend some fresh cream and eggs."

"So kind of you," said Aunt Conyngham.

"You see," said Phillis, "there is a convenience in being acquainted with a dairymaid."

Both Mrs Conyngham and Caruthers knew that Sybil Mayford had called her so, but they had not supposed Phillis knew it, and it was difficult to echo her merry laugh.

"Of the sort they had in Arcadia, when kings' daughters exercised the profession," said Aunt Conyngham with praiseworthy quickness.

"You shall have the biggest bunch of dahlias for that pretty speech," returned Phillis, "and we will cheat the invalid out of two eggs! Lady Jane Grey and Cleopatra laid these—got up unusually early this morning in order to do it. Marie Antoinette and Lady Macbeth produced the others, and theirs are never so good."

Even Mr Caruthers could not resist the absurd speech; he laughed more heartily than was customary with him.

"Shall we go and see Mrs Mayford, Miss French?" asked Aunt Conyngham presently. "She will want to thank you for your lovely flowers, and all the nice things you have brought her."

"Now, aunt, you know she never wanted to thank anybody for anything in the whole course of her life!" cried Maurice, still too vexed with the invalid's former impertinence to Phillis to care what he said, provided he could spare her the possibility of a fresh repetition of such rude folly.

"My dear Maurice, you forget that you are speaking of my friend—an old and valued one," returned Mrs Conyngham reproachfully.

"I don't dispute the fact of her being old, but I fancy she would not be grateful to you for mentioning it," said Maurice.

Mr Caruthers had suffered too much lately at the widow's hands not to betray a certain enjoyment in a jest at her expense. Phillis wisely refrained even from a smile, and somewhat appeased by noticing that, Aunt Conyngham relaxed a little from her injured dignity and said,—

"I was not alluding to her age—"

"Popularly supposed to be coeval with that of the Sphinx," cut in Maurice, "though there is nothing else in common between them, except the eternal smile—the widow's, however, is usually ill-natured instead of calm."

"Now, Maurice, you are really too bad. You know there is nothing I dislike so much as sneers at my friends," said Mrs Conyngham, the more annoyed because she could not help laughing.

"Then I wonder you can endure Mrs Mayford's society," replied Peyton; "for she spares nobody, and her favourite subjects for animadversion are your niece and nephew."

"Oh, Maurice! you must recollect that she has been suffering great pain; we oughtn't to mind if she is a little peevish and cross," urged Mrs Conyngham.

"Illness was not needed to heighten the bitterness of her tongue," persisted Maurice.

"Nor can it be regarded as an excuse for bad temper and evil speaking," rejoined Mr Caruthers, with a severity he seldom displayed in regard to a woman.

Mrs Conyngham was astounded at this outburst from that source, though in her heart she could not blame either of the speakers, but she especially disliked to have such things said before Phillis, so she turned towards her, saying,—

"After this, Miss French, we shall have our own opinions when men declare that they are never scandalous. Now, shall we punish them by running away to visit their victim?"

"I wouldn't punish myself by doing it!" cried Maurice. "Eh, Caruthers?"

"It seems useless voluntarily to suffer martyrdom," that gentleman replied, for, in spite of his disapproval of Phillis, he had been indignant with the inuendoes against her which Mrs Mayford had several times thrown out in his hearing.

"I will go with pleasure, Mrs Conyngham, if you think she would care to have me," said Phillis, out of deference to her hostess's feelings, refraining even from a reply to the remarks of the two men.

"Indeed, she will reproach me half the day if you don't," cried Aunt Conyngham, in a voice of real distress.

"Poor aunt! you must feel in these days as if you were the keeper of a menagerie of one!" laughed Maurice.

"She would hardly forgive me the last time you were here, because I did not let her know," pursued Mrs Conyngham. "May I at least ask if she would like to see you?"

"Oh, certainly," Phillis answered.

"Miss French believes that bitterness is a tonic," said Maurice.

"When it is not it is usually poison," added Mr Caruthers.

"Please ring the bell, one of you," cried Mrs Conyngham; "I am ashamed of both!"

Rosalie was summoned and bidden to carry the basket to Mrs Mayford, and inform that lady of Miss French's presence in Mrs Conyngham's room. The Abigail returned with an invitation for the whole party to visit the invalid, and though the gentlemen rebelled, Phillis insisted upon their going as a punishment for their recent sins of speech. She took Mr Caruthers's arm, and Mrs Conyngham her nephew's, and the pair were obliged to submit.

They found Mrs Mayford sitting up among her cushions, attired in an exceedingly tasteful but over juvenile costume, and looking unusually young and well, a fact of which she was entirely conscious, and it rendered her good-natured.

She received Phillis rapturously, thanked Mrs Conyngham for bringing her, and greeted the two gentlemen in her most amiable fashion.

"Though I owe them no thanks for coming," she added gaily; "I am sure you were the attraction, Miss French! My cousin is a rare visitor, and Maurice never comes near me."

"I think I have not failed to call or inquire daily since you were able to receive me," Mr Caruthers said.

"And if I keep away, it is only because I fear for my peace of mind," added Maurice.

Mrs Mayford laughed, but gave him a quick glance of vexation—when he wanted to punish her he often indulged in these little thrusts which she understood as nobody else did.

"Now, if dear Georgia were only here, our party would be complete," she added, with elaborate playfulness; "Georgia and that delightful creature, so brusque, so charmingly Irish—that Mr Bourke of yours—or Georgia's—which of you claims him, Miss French?"

"Oh, we share him between us," Phillis replied.

"Now, do you expect us to believe that, however generous you both are, two young ladies would consent to such a partnership?" cried the widow, with her most affected laugh. "That won't suffice, will it, cousin?"

"I am afraid I don't know enough about young ladies to judge," he answered quietly.

"And where is Georgia?" continued Mrs Mayford, addressing Phillis. "Off botanising with your mutual property, I suppose."

"Reading to my grandmother, I fancy," Phillis replied; "we do our botanising all together."

Mrs Conyngham rewarded her with a cordial smile, feeling at the moment that she quite shared Georgia's enthusiasm for Miss French, and Mr Caruthers's face for once showed a similar approval.

"And what does Maurice do in the meanwhile?" asked Mrs Mayford, still with her affected laugh, which was inexpressibly irritating.

"I sit and compose sonnets. I am hoping each day to produce one perfect enough to offer at your shrine," said he.

"You have written so many to so many different women that I should think it would be difficult to invent anything new," said she.

"I shall surprise you sometime by a brilliant effort. You'll excuse its tardiness for the sake of its merit," returned he.

Mrs Mayford knew of old that she was certain to be worsted if she began tilting at him, so she gave up the contest, allowed the conversation to become general for a few minutes, managing as her contribution divers compliments to Phillis, which she contrived, with a good deal of skill, to make at Miss Grosvenor's expense, because she knew she could annoy Mrs Conyngham and Mr Caruthers by that means. The gentleman felt his patience rapidly evaporating, and was meditating an exit, though aware that he should find it difficult to escape her clutches, when luckily a servant appeared at the door with the information that a couple of the coal directors wished to see him.

The others rose too, but Mrs Mayford positively held fast to Phillis, and cried out against this cruelty in deserting her so soon.

"I hardly ever get a visit from you," she pleaded, and this tiresome ankle won't let me go to you."

"I hope it will before long," Phillis said civilly.

"The doctor has promised that I may drive to-morrow," said Mrs Mayford; "but I don't know if my cousin will be able to spare time to take me."

"I shall be at your service," he answered.

"Oh then, Miss French, I shall come to see you! I am dying for another peep at your picturesque house, and that dear, delightful grandmama of yours."

"We will make a high day and holiday of it, if Mrs Conyngham and Mr Caruthers will come too and have tea with us," said Phillis, who cared no more for Mrs Mayford's petty spitefulness than she did for the buzzing of a fly, and enjoyed the opportunity of teasing Maurice by giving the invitation. Mr Caruthers bowed his thanks, and the widow cried,—

"Oh, that will be heavenly! But I can't walk a step; I shall have to be carried downstairs."

"The carriage can drive up to the porch; you shall be lifted out, and established on a lounge—I can't say sofa, for I haven't got one," said Phillis.

"So good of you—so kind!" exclaimed the widow. "Won't it be charming, Mrs Conyngham?"

"I shall be most happy to go," that lady answered; "I only hope you won't find the exertion too much for your nerves."

Mrs Mayford knew, and so did the others, that Mrs Conyngham meant temper when she said nerves, and the invalid sighed.

"Ah! I have worn out everybody's patience —no wonder!"

"I trust that illness would never wear out mine," Mrs Conyngham replied very significantly, for she had not recovered her equanimity since the attacks on Georgia.

Mr Caruthers took his leave, and Maurice, finding that the widow was determined to detain Phillis, said,—

"I'll go with you, Caruthers; I want to hear what your men have decided. Miss French, I will come back for you in a few minutes."

"She has promised me half-an-hour!" cried the widow, "and I'll not be cheated out of a second."

When the gentlemen had departed, Mrs Conyngham excused herself; she had a letter to write which must go by the noon post, and was glad to escape, for, between the dissatisfaction roused in her mind by her conversation with Mr Caruthers, and the annoyance left from Mrs Mayford's sneers, she could endure no more that morning.

Phillis French did not in the least mind the interview; she declared to Georgia afterwards that she found it interesting—like studying

some new species of wasp in such an imperfect stage of development, that half the time when it tried to sting it hurt itself, instead of its intended victim.

But for a while the widow was sweetness personified; she petted and flattered Phillis, and tried her best to hide the fact that she considered herself condescending, and Phillis French hugely enjoyed her unconsciously patronising tone, and appeared innocent and rural and unsophisticated, longing to discover what motive really lay at the bottom of the shallow creature's desire for the *tête-à-tête.*

Mrs Mayford played her part very well, but she stood about as much chance of snatching Phillis French as an elderly, captious grimalkin would in deceiving an active young fox, and before many moment's Phillis perceived her drift —she wanted to find out on what terms Georgia and Mr Caruthers stood; whether he was often at the house, and if there were truth enough in her suspicions that Bourke liked Georgia to give her a new means of worrying her cousin. And Phillis, far from sharing Hamlet's dislike to being played upon as a pipe, chanted softly what the widow thought a tune of her own selection, and managed to say a score of things which enraged her listener, without affording any information that could be in the least valuable for her purpose.

It would have required a much more acute person to penetrate Phillis's assumption of inno-

cence, and Mrs Mayford finally took refuge in ill-temper at her lack of success in gaining a gleam of news, and mentally decided that the girl was a rustic idiot, and all the talk she had heard from the others about her witty speeches and *espièglerie* all nonsense. She waxed openly condescending and patronising, and Phillis French received the patronage so meekly that she was induced to go to still further lengths. She began to talk about Maurice Peyton—to tell tales of his wildness, his profligacy, his heartlessness towards women, his desire to captivate and render wretched every girl he approached.

"I tried once before to make you understand, my dear," she said, "and now I feel it my duty to speak openly! I have taken such a fancy to you—you are so sweet, so natural, so unspoiled. I should never forgive myself if I sat by and let you suffer from believing in Maurice Peyton's falsehoods."

"Oh!" shivered Phillis, apparently quite aghast at this revelation of the young man's turpitude.

"I know him thoroughly!" she cried, lifting her voice in the excitement into which she had worked herself. "I warn you for your own peace to be careful! Maurice Peyton will make love to you if he can—"

"Sybil!" called a warning voice.

The widow and Phillis looked round. To the former's utter confusion she saw Mrs Conyngham and Peyton standing in the doorway. They had

met in the hall and reached the threshold just in time to catch her closing words.

Mrs Conyngham looked angry—Maurice white and determined—but Phillis French was utterly unmoved.

A quick thought darted through Peyton's mind ; he would turn the woman's spitefulness to service for himself ! If he spoke out before her and his aunt he should do more to convince Phillis of his sincerity than he could in weeks of ordinary intercourse. He came forward—his aunt followed.

" Thanks, dear Mrs Mayford," he said, " for pleading my cause ! I have already made love to Miss French ! I have asked her to marry me, and though she will give me no hope as yet, I trust some day she may."

Mrs Conyngham sank into the first chair that offered—a picture of helpless misery !

For once in her life Phillis French was taken aback, and sat speechless, blushing hotly enough to justify Mrs Mayford's term of " pretty rustic." As for the widow herself, she was frightened, and could only cower low among her cushions with a nervous titter, feeling that the best way out for her was to have hysterics, and thankful to find herself so near them.

At this instant, two ladies stopping in the hotel appeared at the door. Phillis took her leave of Sybil Mayford—whispered something in Mrs Conyngham's ear, which caused her listener's face to brighten—and left the room, accompanied by Peyton.

They went downstairs, got into the carriage, and drove away. Maurice did not speak till they had left the town behind them, and his silence afforded Phillis French an opportunity to recover her wits and decide upon her wisest line of conduct at this crisis.

Suddenly he turned towards her, and said,—

"I have to thank Mrs Mayford; you can never pretend not to think me in earnest again."

"It was very gallant of you," retorted she. "Don't be frightened—I sha'n't take a base advantage!"

"Now, in heaven's name, what do you mean?" he cried.

"Just what I said! It was very gallant of you! You were afraid I might be confused by the contretemps, and so flung yourself into the gap—but I told your aunt you only did it out of chivalry, and that I perfectly understood your motives."

She began to laugh—he bit his moustache quite savagely.

"I do think you are the most unfeeling girl that ever lived!" cried he.

"It was too funny!" she exclaimed. "How I wish Georgia had been there! Now, don't be cross—I tell you I admired your knight-errantry—do let us laugh a little!"

"I will, when you admit that you believe me—that you know I love you—that—"

"Bless me, there is Ann Raines!" interrupted Phillis.

And sure enough, at the turn of the road they had reached stood Miss Raines, upright and stiff, waiting for the waggon to pass.

"Laud's sakes! I want to know—if it ain't you?" she cried.

"In the flesh," said Phillis. "We will take you home; I was going to send for you this afternoon—we really must cut out those new curtains."

"Wall, I'm agreeable," replied Miss Raines. "Don't budge, Mr Peeton—the waggon ain't high, and I can hist myself in as easy as winkin'! I hope you're pretty chirpy this mornin'?"

"As a wood-thrush," laughed Phillis.

Maurice privately anathematised the old maid, but he reflected that any show of crossness would only amuse Phillis French, so he answered merrily, and they drove home in perfect harmony.

But could he have known what a relief the spinster's appearance was to Phillis, he would have forgiven Miss Raines and gained fresh hope.

CHAPTER VI.

IT would require the powers of an epic poet to chant the description of the battle royal which took place between Mrs Conyngham and the widow, when the former had sufficiently recovered from her stupefaction to set about the punishment of her ungrateful friend.

Sybil Mayford fought gallantly, but found herself no match for her antagonist, now that the latter was fully roused. Without meaning disrespect to either lady, I must confess that any looker-on would have been irresistibly reminded of a contest between a white owl and a hawk; but however comical the duel might have appeared to irreverent witnesses, it was downright tragic to the pair engaged.

When other resources failed, Mrs Mayford took refuge in hysterics, but they proved as unavailing as her wordy weapons. She was mercilessly spattered with water, given to drink of something as bitter as hyssop, and all the while the voice of her ministering spirit heaped wrath and condemnation upon her, and wound up with

a threat never to approach her again—never to speak to her while life should last, unless she apologised to Maurice.

The widow knew that Mrs Conyngham could show as energetic in animosity as in friendship, so she agreed at length that a message expressive of regret should be given to Peyton. Then she fell back in renewed hysterics, sobbing,—

"You might thank me, I should think, instead of upbraiding! Now, you know just how crazy Maurice is, and can try to stop him! I don't suppose you are anxious to have that girl—nobody knows who—for a niece."

Mrs Conyngham deigned no reply, but the words went home. She retired to her room and indulged in reflections of a very melancholy nature, which were interrupted by the appearance of the brother and sister, looking as cheerful as if quite unconscious of the trouble they were causing her.

Aunt Conyngham received the pair with what she intended for an air of gentle melancholy, but which they interpreted to mean crossness, and a glance exchanged between them, said very plainly that they wished they had kept away.

"I have brought Georgia to make you a visit, you duck of an auntie," cried Maurice gaily.

"I am very much obliged, I am sure," Mrs Conyngham replied plaintively; "it is getting quite an event for me to have a visit from either of you."

"It is at least twenty-four hours since I was

here last," Georgia answered, laughing outright. Plaintiveness was not a style which suited the aunt, and she appeared ludicrous when she attempted it; Maurice always declared that it seemed as much out of keeping as it would for a peacock to affect humility.

"And I dawned upon you this morning, along with the sunshine and other beautiful things," he added, as a sequence to Georgia's remark.

"Oh, if you call *that* coming to see *me!*" returned Aunt Conyngham, with an emphasis to which no italics could do justice.

"Well, what do you call it, auntie?" Maurice asked.

"When either of you come, it is to rush in and out like a whirlwind, and bring a crowd of people in your wake," cried Aunt Conyngham, with a magnificence of exaggeration which would have done credit to a poet. "You must excuse me if I say that I do not consider such proceedings visits! No doubt you will tell me I am unreasonable and *exigeante*—"

"I am afraid I shall have to," cut in Maurice.

"I expect to be misunderstood," sighed Aunt Conyngham; "it is the usual fate of the few people in this world who try to do their duty by their relatives and friends."

"You are tired, auntie," said Georgia. "I am sure you have had a good deal to bear today."

"Indeed, I have," she replied, with a despairing accent which was lost on Georgia, as she

knew nothing of what had taken place; but Maurice understood what it meant, and smiled blandly under the curves of his long blonde moustache.

"I suppose that wretched Mrs Mayford has been more teasing than usual," continued Georgia, in all innocence; "but you must be a good auntie, and not visit her sins on our heads."

"Heaven forbid that I should add to the weight of your own!" cried Aunt Conyngham, for an instant permitting her plaintiveness to degenerate into a tone of downright aggression.

"I am not conscious of having done so either," said Georgia; "it must be Maurice—what new wickedness have you committed, my erring brother?"

"'To err is human,'" began Maurice pompously; 'to forgive—'"

"We know all about that!" interrupted Georgia. "But Aunt Conyngham doesn't look a bit as if she meant to be divine on this occasion."

"Oh, Georgia, you had better tell me at once that I am cross and detestable. It is your habit, whenever I attempt to expostulate or offer you advice if I see you doing wrong," Mrs Conyngham replied with mingled severity and pathos.

"Mercy, dear, don't make me feel as if I was one of those misguided young orphans who need to be put in a reformatory asylum," Georgia exclaimed.

"Pardon me, Georgia," said her aunt, "but

I do not think such allusions quite—quite delicate."

"Lord!" groaned Maurice. "Now, auntie, I really do not think I can stand much of this sort of thing! Tell Georgia what it is you are in a wax about—if it is with her—or me, if I am the one—but don't make a sort of sentimental Lady Macbeth of yourself, for heaven's sake, and all our sakes, I beg and entreat."

"If that incomprehensible expression means that you think I am angry, you are mistaken. I am grieved—grieved and hurt," she answered, putting her handkerchief to her eyes—not because there were any tears there, but it seemed a fitting finale to her pathetic assertion.

"What has Sybil Mayford been saying?" asked Georgia. "How can you let her spiteful tongue set you worrying over us, auntie?"

"Do you suppose me capable of allowing any person to speak against my own flesh and blood?" demanded Aunt Conyngham grandly.

"But I know she will do it, whether you permit or not," cried Georgia, laughing, and relieved to find an excuse for so doing.

"This time she was right enough in much that she said," retorted Aunt Conyngham, somewhat inconsistently.

"Oh, then she has been abusing us. I was sure of it!" cried Georgia.

"I shall not try to defend myself a second time. If you choose to accuse me of letting people speak ill of you, I shall submit," returned

Aunt Conyngham, ignoring with delightful ease the admission which had just left her lips. "Maurice, Mrs Mayford desired me to apologise to you for what we overheard her say this morning."

She gave Georgia a glance of reproachful triumph as she spoke, and seemed to expect her to be overwhelmed by this refutation of the charge that she, Aunt Conyngham, the model of all virtues, could be disloyal to her young relatives, whatever their sins; but Georgia only looked unbounded wonder as to what the words could possibly mean.

"I don't wish to be evasive," said Maurice, "but you must permit me to say—hang Mrs Mayford and her apologies."

"But what were they for?" asked Georgia. "What had she said?"

"Only the old story—I was a villain, a libertine—assassin, I presume, and all the rest of it," Maurice explained. "She was saying it to Phillis French, and we overheard! I was very much obliged to the old cat—it gave me an opportunity to—"

Mrs Conyngham interrupted him by sinking back in her chair with a long, low groan.

"An opportunity to—well?" demanded Georgia, cruelly oblivious of her aunt's ostentatious signs of anguish.

"To say that I was in love with Phillis, and had asked her to marry me," Maurice replied composedly.

Mrs Conyngham was preparing to groan a

second time, but Georgia's manner of receiving her brother's disclosure kept her silent with stony wrath. The young lady first clapped her hands; then she flew at Maurice and hugged him, exclaiming,—

"I am so glad—so glad! And will she—will she?"

"Well, that's a subject for future consideration," said he, with a quizzical smile. "At all events, I could give her no better proof that I was dead earnest, than by speaking out there and then, so I did it."

"I had so hoped you would—I am so glad!" ejaculated Georgia, clapping her hands anew.

Mrs Conyngham regarded her with a mixture of pity and disgust.

"As you are not five years old, and I trust not a maniac, Georgia, perhaps you will sit down and let me finish what I wished to say to Maurice, instead of prolonging this display, which looks as if you were the one or the other."

"Such delightful news does not come every day!" cried Georgia. "You really must let me be a little crazy, aunt."

Maurice gave her an affectionate smile, but after one final glare of scorn, Mrs Conyngham fairly turned her back on the absurd young woman, and addressed her nephew with appalling stateliness,—

"I understood perfectly what your motive was in speaking as you did."

"I should say it was plain enough," he broke in.

Georgia laughed from sheer happiness; Mrs Conyngham lifted both hands in protest.

"Miss French understood also—she whispered to me that she fully comprehended," pursued the stately lady.

"I hope so; I am sure!" rejoined Maurice.

"I knew that you wished to relieve Miss French from an embarrassing situation," his aunt continued, ignoring his rapid sentence; "I knew that you had no idea she would take your gallant speech seriously."

"You had better tell him he is a coward and be done!" cried Georgia, with flashing eyes.

Again Mrs Conyngham elevated her hands, then continued, addressing Maurice, who regarded her with an amusing smile which so discomfited her, that instead of the words of wisdom she meant to utter, she only produced a weak repetition of a former remark.

"Miss French knew it too—she told me so as she went out."

"Did she?" asked Maurice. "That shows how mistaken both you and Miss French can be, my dear aunt! I love her, and if I ever can, I mean to win her for my wife."

Georgia's face grew so radiant and beautiful that it was a pity none of her admirers were present to have the pleasure of looking at her.

Mrs Conyngham indulged in an instant's stony stupefaction, then exclaimed,—

"You, Maurice—you, of all men—the proudest man I know?"

"And to gain that honour will be the pride of my life," said he.

"You—that have always believed in birth and blood—have been so severe on any approach to a *mesalliance*—you, marry a girl of whom one knows nothing."

"The prettiest, cleverest, most bewitching creature that ever lived," interrupted Georgia. "As good and true as she is pretty."

Again Maurice thanked her with a smile, but sat waiting patiently for his aunt to finish.

"In regard to whose antecedents we are completely ignorant—whom you have only known a very short time; it can't be, Maurice. You, who might marry any woman you chose!"

"But, you see, I have chosen her," he replied. "You are quite right. I used to have all sorts of nonsensical ideas about birth and station. They appear empty enough now. I suppose that is because I am really in love at last."

"It is one of your whims—your fancies," cried his aunt. "Maurice, if you persevere, you will be the most wretched man alive. Who is she?—who was she? Just having to answer that question alone will fret you like a goad."

"She is my wife, will be sufficient answer," returned he proudly.

"Oh, you are mad!" exclaimed Mrs Conyngham. "Why, you might marry Lady Dacre's cousin—"

"Oh no, I mightn't!" he replied decidedly.

"This is too much! I never dreamed such a

blow could reach me from you!" moaned his aunt. "Fancy Sybil Mayford telling that your wife was a dairymaid!"

"The young lady is the owner of a very fair country estate," observed Maurice quietly.

"That she sold butter and eggs!" gasped his aunt.

"So do plenty of your friends in Europe, who boast pedigrees and titles that date back to goodness knows where," said Georgia.

Mrs Conyngham turned upon her with withering acrimony.

"No absurd speeches from you, Georgia, can surprise me—I begin to understand where you have acquired your new and astounding ideas! You must excuse me for saying that I think your summer here has been far from improving either to your mind or your manners! But, Maurice—to hear Maurice talk in that insane fashion—it is enough to break one's heart!"

"You will think better of it," said her nephew coolly; "at all events the matter is settled—I mean so far as I am concerned! I shall have a hard struggle to win my prize, for she doesn't think me half good enough for her, and God knows I'm not!"

"With your fortune—your station—your talents!"

"The two first Miss French doesn't value the worth of a straw—the latter she has no great faith in, because, as she justly says, I have done nothing to prove that I possess any."

"A very remarkable young person!" sneered Aunt Conyngham.

"A very remarkable young lady indeed," said Maurice, with elaborate composure, while his eyes began to blaze, and the muscles of his mouth to work. Mrs Conyngham knew the signs, and perceived she must be careful.

"I think her charming too," she said, "in a certain way! Well educated—witty—but not like a person who has lived in society—not what your wife ought to be, Maurice."

"And I think her everything that my wife ought to be; naturally I am the best judge," he answered, flinging back his head with the haughty movement his relatives knew so well. "I had no idea, aunt, of asking advice. I simply make the announcement of my intentions to you and my sister, because you belong to my family; I am the head of it, and though I expect to leave you and Georgia free, I am and must be my own master."

A silence fell upon them for a little; poor Aunt Conyngham looked so wretched that her relatives grew rather sorry for her.

"I think we must go now, Georgia," Maurice said presently.

"I have a great deal to say to Georgia!" cried Aunt Conyngham, rousing herself. She had said all she dared to Maurice, but she did not propose to be awed by his sister.

"You are coming over to the Nest to-morrow," pleaded Georgia.

"Oh, you must make my excuses to—to Miss French," replied Aunt Conyngham, her voice growing suddenly quite weak, as if she were on the verge of exhaustion. "I fear I shall not be equal to the exertion."

"The drive will do you good," said Maurice. "I shall expect you, aunt. Since what happened to-day, your refusing to go, after having accepted the invitation, would be a slight to Miss French which I cannot permit."

"Oh, very well; I will try," sighed she. "But how are you and Sybil Mayford to meet?"

"As usual, if she is polite; but you know she must not try to annoy Miss French."

"Phil doesn't mind her in the least," said Georgia.

"Really, I don't know how she can make up her mind to show her face," cried Mrs Conyng ham. "I assure you she has heard a good many plain truths from me this morning."

It was a sort of comfort to recollect that she had not been worsted in all quarters. Georgia and Maurice could not help feeling, that richly as she deserved rebuke, poor Mrs Mayford was to be pitied on this special day.

When her relatives had gone, Mrs Conyngham sat thinking very dolefully. She could only hope that Maurice's fancy would change before it led him to irremediable lengths. If there was any way of influencing the girl herself—but she was too much afraid of her nephew to venture upon open effort in that direction.

And she had had no opportunity to speak to Georgia about her conduct towards Mr Caruthers; after her hoping that all was settled, to find that the perverse creature demanded fresh delays; to have Maurice's insanity added to these troubles seemed more than she could bear.

She told Mr Caruthers, and had the consolation of perceiving that he shared her views, and was personally predisposed against Phillis French; but as his opinion was not likely to have any weight with Maurice, Mrs Conyngham could only value its expression because it gratified her to obtain sympathy.

Peyton and Bourke spent the evening at the Nest, but Phillis was as anxious as Georgia that their *partie carrée* should not divide into two *tête-à-têtes*, and naturally the pair were able easily to circumvent all the plans the young men could devise to bring about this consummation.

When the visitors were gone, and the girls upstairs in Phillis's room, Georgia said,—

"I know all about it—oh, you darling! You will be my sister; now promise!"

"Be your great-grandmother!" cried Phillis French. "What nonsense have you got in your head now?"

"I feel quite thankful to that horrid Sybil Mayford," continued Georgia; "it gave Maurice a lovely opportunity! As he says you can never again pretend to believe he is not in earnest."

"I told him it was very polite, so now we are quits," returned Phillis. "Oh dear, it was the funniest scene—if you could only have seen us! I was actually breathless; and your aunt's face of despair; and the Mayford preparing for hysterics; and Maurice strutting up like a huge turkey cock; it was too delicious!"

They both laughed; but Georgia soon said,—

"Now don't be a tease; leave all that for Maurice. We can talk seriously; you know he will never hear a word from me."

"But we've nothing to talk seriously about."

"Oh, Phil! Don't you like him?"

"Have you forgotten what I once said to you?" Phillis asked with sudden austerity. "I must like no man in that way—least of all your brother!"

"Phil, Phil!"

"Don't worry me, Georgia; be good!"

"But you do like him—you do!"

"Good-night," said Phillis, and went away, leaving Georgia completely deprived of her high spirits, though she tried to comfort herself with the thought that Phillis's odd remark only referred to differences in worldly station, not that there was any actual mystery in her life.

CHAPTER VII.

THE girls had given strict orders to their two visitors that they were not to be intruded upon the next morning, as they proposed to devote themselves to certain culinary mysteries, from which were to result marvellous cakes and creams, for the delectation of such well-behaved people as stayed away till tea-time.

Denis was busy, so Maurice went out shooting, but towards noon Phillis French, looking forth from the sacred precincts of her spring-house, saw him approaching the door by the path which led down from the hill.

"You have missed your way," she said, as he came within speaking distance; "there are no partridges here."

"Oh yes, there are," he answered, opening his game bag, and displaying a brace of birds. "These are for grandma."

"There she is in the arbour with Georgia; go and show them to her," said Phillis French.

"But do allow a fellow to rest a minute,

please. Denis pulled me out of bed at daylight, and I've been on my feet ever since," he pleaded.

As he spoke he seated himself on one end of the table at which she stood rolling a sheet of dough into wafer-like thinness, to be cut into fanciful shapes by certain sharp little tin instruments, and which when baked formed a most appetising sweet, exulting in the name of "vanilla cookies." Cinders was busy skimming cream at the other end of the table, and Maurice's second glance was to see if she had not nearly completed her task; and Phillis French saw the glance, and said at once,—

"Cinders, when you have finished, you must pound some sugar. She'll make an awful noise about it, Mr Peyton; if you don't want to be deafened you had better depart."

"And a nice housekeeper you are to waste time in that way, when plenty of pulverised sugar can be bought," he answered.

"One half plaster!" cried she. "Thanks—I don't poison people who come to eat my cake with any such dreadful stuff."

All the while she talked she was working in her brisk, deft fashion, and had covered two large plates with her paste cut into varied patterns of rings and leaves.

"What is to be done with those now?" he asked.

"You are to carry them to the kitchen, for Ninny to put in the oven," she answered.

"There is no hurry, I suppose."

"There is! If they wait they will be spoiled; so go at once, and mind you don't drop them!" she ordered.

He obeyed immediately, and grandma and Georgia laughed aloud as they saw him pass the arbour with his load. He was back in two minutes, and found Phillis French drying her hands on a towel.

"Now you have done everything," he said, "so we can sit down in the garden."

"Do you see those?" she asked, pointing to several tempting-looking loaves of cake. "Those are to be iced—that is why Cinders is pounding sugar—how do you like the noise?"

"It sounds like Lilliputian thunder," he said.

"Harder and faster, Cinders," commanded Miss French in a cheerful voice.

"Come into the garden till she has done making that abominable row," urged Maurice.

"And cull a carrot, Ward!" she quoted from the writings of the immortal Artemus. "Thanks; my name is neither Maud nor Ward, and I don't like carrots, and I've no time to waste on idle young men, and I wish you would go away."

"Then I won't," he answered, "and that's all there is about it."

"Where are the eggs, Cinders?" she asked. "Oh! on the table. Now give me the whisk and two dishes. We're going to have a little more row, as you elegantly term it, Sir Maurice. I hope you'll enjoy the music. If you stop here you must pay for your seat on my table by help-

ing to beat the eggs. Which will you choose—the white or the yolks?"

"What do you want of the yolks? Icing isn't yellow."

"But custard is, Mr Wisdom."

She handed him the dish in which she had put the little golden balls, and gave him the whisk.

"You are to beat and beat, and never leave off," she said. "Take care; mind what you're about, else you'll spill them."

He began his operations, while she took up the dish which contained the whites of the eggs.

"Now at least we can talk a little," he said.

"Oh, with perfect ease," she replied, making a tremendous clatter with the fork wherewith she was beating the snowy liquid. "Faster! you don't stir them half fast enough! Cinders, pound harder; that sugar will never be a powder! The custard is for Mr Caruthers's special benefit; he doesn't like me, but he does like my custard—when it's flavoured with chocolate."

"Who said he didn't like you?" asked Maurice, suspending his toil to ask the question.

"As if one needed to be told! Don't stop; if you can't do two things at once, you must let your inquisitiveness wait till you have beaten the eggs."

"Inquisitive—I?" he cried in scorn.

"Terribly so! I should think you had asked me at least thirty questions since you came in! Ah! now you've got a spot of egg on your coat

sleeve—I knew you would be clumsy. Cinders, bring a towel, and rub this little boy clean! I think, on the whole, I'd better pin it round your shoulders."

He submitted with a good grace, for the pleasure of feeling her pretty fingers touch his neck.

"They are to be my property, you know," he whispered, and then gave a start which nearly upset the pan he held.

"Did I prick you?" Phillis French asked sympathisingly.

"Slightly. I should say that pin must be about a foot long, and as big round as a crowbar."

"If you had kept still you'd not have been hurt. Now, beat, beat, Cinders! — pound, pound!" and she set an example of industry for them to follow, clattering her fork louder and more rapidly than ever.

"Oh, I say, haven't we done it enough?" he asked.

"Not half, not a quarter!"

"But you needn't make so much noise! See here—I want to tell you—"

"You needn't stop; beat, beat! There, that's better! Well, you want to tell me? Cinders, Cinders, there comes the Maltese kitten! Drive her out, else she'll have her nose in the milk-pans before you know it."

To attempt pretty speeches under the circumstances was beyond even Maurice. Just then he heard Georgia and grandma laugh.

"They've caught sight of you," Phillis explained. "Oh, if you could only see how deliciously absurd you look!"

"You've done nothing but force me to look absurd in one way or another ever since I knew you," retorted he.

"You must have a fatal facility for appearing so, since it is so easy to bring the consummation about," she declared.

"Do you ever mean to be serious?" he asked.

"I am serious. See how beautifully these eggs froth! Do you know, I think I shall make a floating island."

"For us to go and live on?"

"Always for Mr Caruthers's benefit. I suppose it is the natural contradiction of human nature, but I adore that stately gentleman, just because he never will even look at me."

"Good gracious! how sick I am of hearing about him. Do leave Georgia's prey alone."

"I won't leave him alone. If he'll not fall in love with me, at least I'll force him to eat himself into an indigestion."

"I don't think your way of treating a man who does fall in love with you is likely to tempt him into the same experiment."

"I couldn't hear," she said, fiercely clattering her spoon; "but it is no matter. I shall place you by Mrs Mayford at the tea-table; mind you keep her good-natured."

"Oh, I'm quite ready to try, since yesterday! Have you been thinking a little, Phillis?"

"Oh yes; I think they are beaten enough," she said. "You may leave off now."

He put the pan on the table with an air of satisfaction, and unpinned his bib. Cinders had ceased pounding sugar, and was taking her departure.

"Now be good-natured to me," he pleaded. "Just say—"

"Drive the kitten out, please; she's got in again."

He expelled the troublesome grimalkin, and then returned to the charge.

"I sha'n't have another moment alone with you all day."

"Good-bye, if you are going. Just bring the pounded sugar within my reach first, like an amiable creature."

"You needn't try to put me off. I—"

"Georgia," called Phillis French, "come here, please, and tell me if I shall colour part of the icing. Bring grandma, too; for, after all, your opinion isn't worth anything."

"Then I shall stop where I am," Georgia called back.

"No, you won't. You must come and drop the sugar in the dish while I beat. Now, hurry; you promised to be useful to-day. Not a crumb of cake shall you have if you don't help me."

So grandma and Georgia entered the spring-house, and Maurice knew that he might as well resign himself to leave the wilful girl in peace for the present. She did not mean him to talk

seriously, and the task of subduing Proteus could not have been more difficult than an effort to force Phillis French to the end of her devices.

He went grumbling back to the Den; but as early in the afternoon as they dared, he and Bourke presented themselves at the Nest. They gained little by this manœuvre, however; for the girls did not descend till nearly time for the arrival of the visitors, and when they did, began arranging flowers on the tea-table, and finding so many other duties to perform that conversation was impossible.

"You two idle young men may roll the green lounge into the porch," Phillis said, with the air of a person conferring a favour. "We do not blame either of you for not being ornamental—that is your misfortune—but we will make you useful, so that you won't have to feel the fact of your existing an entire mistake on the part of nature."

Presently the carriage appeared round a turn in the road, with Mrs Mayford comfortably extended on the back seat.

"Well, they have come early enough," grumbled Maurice.

"Yes; but not too early, as you did," replied Phillis French. "Go down and open the gate, Denis Bourke; and you other little boy, wheel the lounge further forward. Now, be pretty behaved, both of you, and you shall have the pleasure of rolling the fair Dido's couch into the dining-room when we are ready for tea."

The carriage drove up to the porch, somewhat to the detriment of the turf, as Phillis noticed with secret regret. Mr Caruthers helped Mrs Conyngham out, then he and Bourke lifted the widow and placed her on the lounge. For a few moments everybody was occupied with her, and this disposed her to amiability; but indeed she fully intended to restrain her tongue during the whole visit, for she knew that Mrs Conyngham would make her suffer afterwards if she did not.

That lady was in anything but a sunny mood, though very cordial to grandma and gracious to Phillis, while her greeting to Bourke left nothing to be desired. Nobody could have imagined from her manner that, towards the two young people at least, she was far from a Christian state of mind.

Phillis petted the invalid, as much at ease as if no recollection of yesterday's scene remained in her thoughts; and Mrs Mayford, anxious to appease her friend, flattered their young hostess till Mrs Conyngham considered that she overdid the matter, and was almost as much offended as she would have been if the widow had given way to her little infirmity of uttering sharp speeches.

Mr Caruthers talked with grandma, and was rewarded for his respect to age by Georgia's joining them and giving them the benefit of her friendly smiles.

Altogether, the hour before tea passed pleasantly enough. The conversation grew general, and was kept so—to several of the party this proved a relief. Phillis and Maurice were in

high spirits, as there was plenty of laughter and jesting. Aunt Conyngham watched the graceful girl with sternly critical eyes, and could not avoid admitting to herself that she had never seen a more charming creature. But the reflection did not soften her in the least; she had meant Maurice to marry Lady Dacre's cousin, and to be obliged to relinquish any cherished plan was a sore cross to her autocratic disposition.

It was dreadful to her to think that she must sit helpless and let Maurice, if he chose, commit the folly of marrying this unknown girl, over whom would hang the stigma of having made butter and sold eggs! She could hear her friends tormenting her with slighting speeches—troublesome questions—and Sybil Mayford's accounts of the farm, and Phillis's life there! And Phillis would be her niece—hers, Aunt Conyngham's, who was as absurdly proud of her birth and blood as if she had been a Bourbon, instead of a woman born and bred in a republic.

But Maurice would marry her if he wished; as well try to stop a whirlwind as him when bent on following out a caprice! If there were anything she could do—any prejudicial discovery she could make in regard to Phillis! But she recognised the folly of this wish—the girl was a good girl—her young life could hold no mystery. Most probably, no experience in the slightest degree eventful had ever come near her, until this freak of fate to throw in her path the

romance which, to Aunt Conyngham, resembled a modernised version of King Cophetua and the beggar maid.

Her horror and disgust at Maurice's avowal so fully occupied her, that for the time she almost forgot Georgia's unsatisfactory conduct. Then, too, she trusted in her own influence over her niece, and she had none whatever with her nephew—nobody had! And she had been so proud of him—so fond of him—and now he was bent on disappointing her hopes. He would bitterly regret it, when too late; the girl would regret it too—oh, if there were any way of convincing Phillis of that! But there was the danger of Maurice's discovering if she meddled, and his wrath would be unappeasable. She could not endure the thought of losing Maurice out of her life—he had been the sole weakness therein since his childhood. She had remained calm enough in her affection for everybody else, from her husband to Georgia, but she adored her nephew, and she knew his temper, and she was helpless—oh, that was the hardest—helpless!

Towards the hour at which the carriage had been ordered to return for the visitors, Cinders came to say that Patrick was in the kitchen, and wished to speak with Mr Bourke.

"What can the old fellow want?" said Maurice.

"I've not the least idea," replied Denis; "something the matter with one of the horses, perhaps."

He went out of the room, and was gone for

some moments. When he returned he looked so disturbed that everybody noticed it ; and Maurice said,—

"Nothing wrong, I hope ?"

"Nothing of consequence," he answered.

"Is Ferguson worse ?" Maurice asked.

"Has been all day," Denis responded laconically.

Maurice knew that the old man had been seriously ailing for a week, and his thought was that the labourer had died suddenly, and Bourke did not wish to risk disturbing Mrs Mayford's nerves by revealing the fact ; so Peyton asked no more questions.

Denis uttered his farewell somewhat hurriedly, and took his departure.

He had not been long gone when the carriage drove up to the gate. But a stupid blunder had occurred — instead of sending the commodious vehicle of the morning, the livery-man had sent a small carriage in which Mrs Mayford would have to sit upright ; and Mrs Conyngham declared that the fatigue would be too great after the unusual exertion of the day ; and there was, besides, danger that the lame ankle might receive some fresh injury.

"But it will be very late before the man can drive to Wachuset, and get back with the other carriage," Mr Caruthers expostulated.

Grandma said at once,—

"Mrs Mayford must not think of going to-night."

"Certainly not," added Phillis. "There is a bedroom on the ground floor, Mrs Mayford; we can make you perfectly comfortable. Please consider yourself disposed of."

Mrs Mayford made a few difficulties—not because she cared particularly about being obliged to remain, but because it was her habit always to make difficulties, and she wanted Mr Caruthers to feel that he was to blame. However, Mrs Conyngham took the matter into her own hands. Sybil must stop! So the invalid thanked grandma and Phillis, expressed unnecessary contrition for causing so much trouble, and then Aunt Conyngham and Mr Caruthers drove off.

Maurice and Cinders helped Mrs Mayford to the room near grandma's, quickly put in readiness; and as both girls were occupied with the widow—likely to be for the next hour, Georgia told him—and grandma had at once gone to bed, Peyton said good-night and departed.

As Georgia had predicted, it took a long while to dispose of the invalid; and, this accomplished, the girls went up to their rooms.

"Mr Bourke looked very odd and troubled," Georgia said, as they were about to separate. "I hope there was nothing serious the matter."

"Probably your brother was right in what he told us as he was going away. I daresay poor old Ferguson is dead, and Denis does not want to explain before Mrs Mayford."

Georgia said nothing more, but the explanation did not satisfy her. The distress in Denis

Bourke's face had not been the shock of surprise at hearing of a death; nor could Ferguson's dying cause regret, for he had suffered a great deal, and death was a blessed release. No, something had happened—some blow which affected Bourke personally—deeply too—and Georgia could not put the conviction out of her mind. By-and-by, as she sat thinking instead of preparing for bed, she recollected that their sympathy and anxiety was only another proof of the depth of her feeling for Denis. The bare idea that some trouble had come to him, roused such a desire to share it, that she was frightened; reason would lose all power to control her heart if he were in trouble.

Mrs Mayford did not go to sleep; she was restless after the unusual excitement of her drive, and she lay thinking—of Georgia and Mr Caruthers—of her failure in producing an impression on that gentleman—of Phillis French, whom she had begun actively to hate, because the means, though innocently, of her enduring humiliation. Mrs Conyngham's victory rankled in her mind, and the fact of having been obliged to apologise to Maurice Peyton was gall and wormwood to her.

As she lay on her bed, busy with these reflections, a step sounded beneath her window. She was horribly frightened, and swift visions of midnight robbers flashed across her cowardly soul. As she stretched out her hand to seize the handbell, meaning while she rang it to shriek with all

her might until assistance came, she heard a voice call softly,—

"Phillis! Phillis!"

She half raised herself and waited; a little shower of gravel was flung against the window above hers—the window of Miss French's room she knew, for Phillis had told her that she occupied the chamber overhead. She fairly held her breath to listen; heard Miss French cautiously cross the floor in an instant, heard her say,—

"Denis, is that you?"

"Yes," Bourke answered. "Come down—quick!"

"Hush," Phillis said. "I'll come."

No more words passed; Bourke walked away from the casement. She could hear Phillis moving about for a few seconds—then came the sound of a door opening and closing—then a light tread on the stairs.

Sybil Mayford's heart gave a bound of malicious delight. Phillis French going to meet the young Irishman at that hour! Here was her longed-for opportunity; she could punish the girl, and avenge herself on Peyton. Although the effort cost her excruciating agony, she managed to get out of bed and crawl to the open window—the blinds screened her, and an easy-chair stood near, into which she sank with a smothered groan. But the physical pain only added to the eagerness of her malice. She felt as if it were Miss French's fault that she had to endure it.

She peered eagerly through the *persiennes;* the

moon cast a flood of silver light about, which rendered every object as distinctly visible as if it had been day. She heard Denis Bourke's voice—heard another man's in reply, though she could not catch the words. Presently Phillis appeared round the corner of the house; then she saw Bourke hurry out from a thicket of lilac bushes and join her. Phillis was wringing her hands, and her face looked ghastly in the moonbeams. Bourke was evidently trying to comfort her, and very soon the girl recovered her self-control. The pair moved towards the garden. Mrs Mayford saw a man join them, then the three disappeared.

Instead of going home, Peyton had wandered down to the lake and strayed about its margin, dreaming of Phillis and the new hopes which his great love had so unexpectedly brought into his life At last he turned and walked through the wood towards the Nest; yielding to an impulse like that which had led him to Mrs Plummer's house the night little Miranda died.

He opened the gate and entered the grounds; suddenly he caught the sound of footsteps behind the lilac trees. He stepped quickly forward and met Denis Bourke; a little further back stood Phillis.

"You here!" he exclaimed, in a tone of mingled wonder and anger. "And—and Miss French!"

"Is it your affair?" returned Phillis passionately.

Before Peyton or Bourke could speak, Georgia's voice called,—

"Maurice, is that you?"

She emerged into the moonlight, went up to Phillis, and put her arm about her friend's waist. She could feel the girl tremble in every limb, and her eyes fastened on Georgia with an expression of unutterable anguish; but Maurice could not see this, for she had turned her back on him.

"Upon my word, you are all indulging in a late promenade," cried Maurice, trying to laugh, relieved by the fact of Georgia's presence from some vague, wrathful suspicion which had had no time to develop itself, and a little confused by the necessity for accounting for his own presence.

Georgia had not been long in her room when she recollected having left an unread letter on Phillis's table; certain that her friend had not yet gone to bed, she decided to seek her epistle. She crossed the hall on tiptoe, and opened Phillis's door—the room was empty. Phillis must have remembered some neglected duty; the hen-house was not shut or the turkeys were out, and with her usual promptitude had flown off to attend to matters. Georgia determined to follow; perhaps she would be of assistance; at all events she was not sleepy, and glad of a pretext to stray about in the moonlight.

She stepped back into her chamber, threw a shawl over her head, and went downstairs, candle in hand. The side door was ajar; she passed out

on the lawn. She could see nothing of Phillis, and moved towards the garden. As she neared the thicket she saw a man hurry off in the opposite direction, and an instant after caught sight of Phillis and Bourke. Before she could call to them she perceived Maurice, heard his angry, startled exclamation, and ran forward; her first thought being to give Phillis the support of her presence.

A brief pause followed Peyton's last words, then Bourke said,—

"Poor old Ferguson is dead, Maurice!"

"Well, I think you might have waited till morning to come and tell the news," replied Maurice irritably. "I suppose these young women were poetising in the moonlight. Really, Georgia, with your delicate throat, you ought to be more careful. Miss French, I thought you a better guardian."

"I am not your sister's guardian, nor is she mine, nor do I mean to have one," cried Phillis.

"I beg your pardon. Of course I was only jesting," Maurice said penitently.

Georgia knew that Phillis was angry at the suspicion betrayed in her brother's first speech, but something else ailed the girl; she was distressed and frightened.

"You seem to have been in a poetical mood yourself, Maurice," said Georgia, endeavouring to speak playfully. "We thought you were safe at home long ago."

"It seemed a shame to shut oneself up such

a beautiful night," returned Peyton, laughing somewhat confusedly, still trying to catch a glimpse of Phillis's face, which was carefully averted, alarmed and conscience-stricken by the fear that he had deeply offended her.

"Send them both away; I can't bear any more," Phillis whispered, in Georgia's ear.

This appeal had no reference to her irritation against Peyton. Georgia comprehended that! This was the culmination of the mystery in Phillis's life, which her friend had so long suspected, and tried so hard to believe a mere fancy of her own.

"We will go and see Ferguson's wife in the morning, Mr Bourke," she said. "It is bed-time—so we must bid you two gentlemen good-night."

She held out her hand to him with a frank smile; he knew there was no cloud between them, no suspicion in her loyal mind—whatever Phillis chose to tell or withhold, could not change her sentiments towards either.

"Then we'll be off," said Denis. "Good-night, Miss Phillis."

"Good-night," she replied, glancing uneasily around.

"And may I not be spoken to?" asked Maurice.

"Pleasant dreams," she said, after a moment's hesitation, and walked away.

Maurice was following, but Georgia laid her hand on his arm.

"Go home—good-night," she whispered, and hastened after her friend.

The two entered the house, and stole softly upstairs. Georgia drew Phillis into her room, and shut the door; the lamp light showed her face so drawn and white, that Miss Grosvenor was terrified.

"You know you can trust me, Phil," she said. "You promised once that if ever I could help you, you would let me—has the time come?"

"Yes," Phillis answered, standing before her, rigid and pale. "It has come—I am going to tell you everything."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE two men walked towards Bourke's house.

"If Mrs Mayford happened to hear your voice, she will make us a nice blow up with the aunt," grumbled Maurice.

"Mrs Mayford—where is she?"

"In the ground floor bedroom. The liveryman sent the wrong carriage, so that Witch of Endor had to stop all night."

Denis knew that she must have heard him call Phillis; he could only hope that she had not caught another voice, though he remembered that the person who accompanied him had spoken, but they were not very near the window at the time.

Nothing more was said about the matter; Maurice's thoughts were fully occupied by the fear that his first angry, suspicious words had offended Phillis.

The next morning Peyton did not rise until somewhat after his usual hour, for he had scarcely slept. He woke suddenly from the uneasy

slumber into which he had fallen after daybreak; Phillis's voice seemed ringing in his ears. The impression was so strong that he sprang out of bed—ran to the open window, and peeped through the blinds—he only saw Denis Bourke coming across the lawn from the zigzag path. He had been dreaming of her doubtless—of course it was absurd to have supposed she would be up the house at that hour.

When he went downstairs, almost the first words Bourke said were,—

"I hate mysteries, Maurice, but I've got a visitor for a couple of days. He will keep to his room, and we won't speak of his being here to anybody—the trio in the kitchen are safe not to talk."

Peyton thought it beyond a doubt that Denis was hiding some man falsely accused of being a Molly Maguire, and unable at present to clear himself, as had already once happened, so he only answered,—

"All right! You'll land in prison one of these days, old Don Quixote!"

Bourke had waited breakfast, and they sat down to it, Maurice making no allusion to the little scene in the garden. He feared Denis might tell him that Phillis would have reason to be incensed by his words and tone, and that no doubt she was.

While they were still at table, Joe Grimshaw entered.

"Mr Peyton," he said, "your sister is down

by the pond—she wants to know if you won't go for a walk with her."

"Will you come too, Denis?" asked Maurice, as he rose and lighted his cigar, preparatory to starting.

"Can't," said Denis; "I've something to do. Stop here, Joe—I want you!"

"I'm all hunky, Mr Bourke," Joe replied, with equal irreverence and goodwill.

Maurice descended the zigzags, and found Georgia by the lake.

"Never call me lazy again!" she said, as he kissed her. "Good morning. It is only a little after eight o'clock."

"You look pale," returned he. "Aren't you well?"

"Only so-so. 'Jist tol'able,' as the negroes say."

"Where is P. French?"

"Gone to see poor Mrs Ferguson. She wouldn't take me with her, because she said it would only distress me uselessly—she is always having some kind thought."

"Was she angry with me last night?"

"She has not mentioned it."

"Well, it was late for you to be there!"

"Nonsense, Maurice! As if we didn't often sit out till midnight," Georgia answered, relieved by the certainty that her brother had no suspicion anybody besides herself and Bourke had been with Phillis. But she had a matter of weight upon her mind, and must get rid of it.

"I want to ask a favour of you," she cried abruptly.

"Granted—to the half of my kingdom," he replied playfully.

The money which fell to her share when her brother and Aunt Conyingham sold the houses in town, had been employed by Georgia to pay her debts, and she had determined never to have any more as long as she lived. Phillis needed money immediately—that very day—and supposing Georgia still possessed those unexpected gains at her bankers, asked the loan she required. The request had been acceded to with affectionate heartiness, and Georgia congratulated herself on the fact that she had never happened to tell her friend of the use to which she had put her "fairy gold," as they had laughingly styled it, else, as Phillis knew what her income was, she would have known that Georgia could not accommodate her without applying to Maurice, and even in this exigency the girl would not have permitted her to do so.

It was a great humiliation this necessity for borrowing of her brother, but Phillis's need was so urgent that she could not hesitate, though no personal strait, however terrible, would ever have forced Georgia to touch a penny from the fortune Maurice's father had left, with such insulting conditions attached, where her mother was concerned.

"Aren't you going to tell what this wonderful request is?" asked Maurice, as she stood nerv-

ously playing with the buttons of his coat. "It can't be anything so very dreadful that you need hesitate and turn red and white! I don't suppose you require the head of an enemy, or an admirer either."

"No, no!" she answered, trying to laugh. She paused an instant longer; the words she must speak seemed fairly to choke her—but it was for her friend—what mattered any hurt to her abominable pride in that cause. And animated by this reflection, she said quickly, "I want—Maurice, I want some money."

Nothing could have surprised him more than this demand; since she was a very young girl he had not ventured to offer her any; she had told him that she would rather go hungry than accept it, and if they were to remain friends, he must never ask her to do so—never even offer her a present more expensive than her means enabled her to make him. He perceived by her face and voice, how difficult she found it to utter her request. She must have been actually persecuted by some importunate creditor before she resorted to this step. But he was only too thankful that she had come to him, and hastened to say in an indifferent voice,—

"Bless me, is that all! How much, Pussy?"

"You see I have spent mine—I told you I wanted to get out of debt. Oh, I'll never be extravagant again!" she cried. I shall pay it back—it will take some time, but—"

"Don't be a Georgian goose!" he interrupted,

passing his arm about her waist and drawing her towards him, in order to kiss her forehead. "How much do you want, Honey-pots?"

"Eighteen hundred dollars."

"I've my bank book in my pocket," he said; "we will go on to the Nest, and I'll write you a cheque, so that you can send it off by the noon post."

This did not suit Georgia's purpose; she could not give Phillis the cheque bearing Maurice's signature; but she reflected that she could cash it at the Wachuset Bank. Maurice had funds enough by him, so that he would not be obliged to go there, and consequently would not learn that she had drawn the money, and conceive any suspicion that it had not been asked for personal needs.

"It is so good of you!" she exclaimed. "I can't tell you how obliged I am."

"Nonsense; if you say a word more I shall turn rusty, and then we are sure to quarrel," he answered. "Come on to the house. Now, mind, you are not to allow P. French to be cross with me—I'm afraid she was."

"Oh, she will have forgotten it by this time," Georgia replied, but, cheerfully as she spoke, the painful thought which had haunted her during the night started up with fresh bitterness. There was a terrible blow in store for her brother. If he persisted in his love, he must be told Phillis's secret. Oh, poor Phillis—poor Maurice! How hard life was—what fiendish

satisfaction fate seemed to find in tormenting everything human.

But she must get away from this trouble; she should lose all show of composure else, and convince her brother that her agitation was not caused solely by the hurt to her pride, involved in the necessity of seeking pecuniary aid.

Luckily, Maurice was in one of his gayest moods, and therefore she could easily set him talking merry nonsense. When they reached the house, they went into the sitting-room; he wrote the cheque and handed it to her.

"I suppose the Mayford is still asleep," he said; "but where is the blessed old grandma?"

"She is in bed too; she is not well this morning, and Phil persuaded her to lie quiet. It is nothing serious—she got too tired yesterday," Georgia explained.

He walked into the porch, and she followed.

"I should think Miss French meant to stop all day with Mrs Ferguson," he said impatiently. "It is nine o'clock already."

The bank would be open—Georgia wanted to draw the money and return before her aunt and Mr Caruthers arrived to escort the invalid home.

"I shall go for a ride—will you come too, Maurice?" she asked presently, certain she ran no risk of his consenting—he would not leave the house until he had seen Phillis.

"Oh, I should keep you waiting while I sent Sykes up to the Den for my horse," he said.

"That would make it too late; I must be here when the aunt comes," returned Georgia. "You can sit still and be lazy. I shall put on my habit, and have Cinders tell Mr Sykes to saddle my gallant steed."

She ran off, and by the time she reappeared, her horse was waiting. She rode to the town and settled her business. When she got back, Phillis was standing in the verandah. Dan Sykes came to take the horse, and the two girls went upstairs.

"Here is the money, Phil dear," Georgia said, as soon as they were in her room, "in bank notes—it was better not to give a cheque."

"You think of everything!" Phillis said. "Oh, Georgia, Georgia, how good you are to me!" She leaned her head on her friend's shoulder, and sighed wearily. She looked pale, and the pupils of her eyes were unnaturally dilated, but there was no trace of excitement in her manner.

"Did you go to the Den?" Georgia asked.

"Yes; I met Denis when I was coming away from Mrs Ferguson's house—he told me your brother had gone out."

Georgia asked no question about the interview the girl had held with Bourke's visitor; she just held her close in her arms for a few seconds, knowing that such silent comfort would be most acceptable.

"Was Maurice here when you got back?" she asked presently.

"Yes; but Cinders told me, and I hid—he got tired of waiting, and went off," Phillis replied. "You must change your dress, Georgia."

"Is Mrs Mayford awake yet?" she inquired, as she began unbuttoning her riding-habit.

"Cinders has just carried in her breakfast. I sent to ask if I could play lady's-maid, but she declined to trouble me," said Phillis; "she has Cinders though."

"And is sure to have her ball of pearl powder in her pocket, so she will do well enough," rejoined Georgia. "Lock the money up in my desk till you want it," she added, taking a sealed envelope out of her pocket, and laying it on the table.

"Oh, Georgia, Georgia, what a blessing for me that you had it!" cried Phillis, as she obeyed her friend's directions.

"And now we need not think about it again! You look so tired, Phil!"

"Do I?" she asked, with a painful smile.

"But to-morrow everything will be over," continued Georgia; "your—Mr Bourke's visitor will go, and you can feel tranquil once more."

"About as tranquil as a haunted person that knows the ghost will come back, sooner or later," replied Phillis.

"Oh, my poor darling!" cried Georgia, flinging both arms about her again.

"Don't!" Phillis said, pushing her gently away. "You mustn't pity me—I want all my strength."

"Yes, I know, I know!" sighed Georgia.

Phillis sat down by the table, and leaned her head on her hand, absently watching Miss Grosvenor, who had returned to the duties of her toilette. There was silence between them for awhile; at length Phillis said,—

"Grandma is asleep. She promised me that she would not get up till towards evening—but she is not really ill."

At that moment they heard Denis Bourke's voice in the hall, speaking to Cinders.

"Ask Miss French if I can see her at once?" he said.

"Something has happened!" whispered Phillis, starting to her feet. For a moment she trembled so violently that she could hardly stand, but she waved Georgia off when she tried to support her. "This won't do," she said, with a spectral attempt at her usual manner, which set Georgia crying; "P. French mustn't foil me now—time enough to play baby when it's all over." She walked steadily to the door, and looked back to add, "You'd better come—I may want you."

Georgia dried her eyes and followed; when they entered the room where Bourke was waiting, Phillis was the calmest of the three. He put down a great coat and valise as they appeared, and came forward, closing the door behind them.

"I am going to Philadelphia," he said.

"No, no—not to-day!" exclaimed Georgia,

before she knew what she was saying; "not till —till—"

"Hush!" interrupted Phillis. "Don't you understand—something has happened! Quick, Denis, quick!"

He pulled a newspaper from his pocket, saying,—

"It's of no use to keep it from you. There's a paragraph about his having been seen on his way north. He must get off by Philadelphia. I can manage it, but I must go there first. I'll be back to-morrow evening by the last train. I'm afraid I can't come sooner. He can start the day after, and, indeed, he is suffering that he needs rest."

"Yes, and must have it. Let me read the paragraph, Denis," was all Phillis said.

"It can do no good—"

"Do you suppose anything can hurt me?" she broke in, seizing the journal. She read the article to which Bourke pointed, shuddering a little, but her face was firm. "Will he be safe here?" she asked.

"He could not be in a safer place—he took such a round-about route, that there's no danger of his being traced," Bourke answered. "Don't be frightened, Phillis—but I know how brave you will be!"

"Does Maurice know you are going?" Georgia asked.

"Yes, I met him—he has gone to the station to wait for me."

"Good-bye, Denis," said Phillis. "I can't thank you—I—"

She laid her hand on his shoulder for an instant—struggled in vain to speak, then hurried from the room.

"Thank God she has you with her!" exclaimed Bourke, turning towards Georgia, a smile of infinite tenderness softening his troubled face. "I must go now! Georgia—Georgia—can't you say a word—one word?"

It seemed to the girl as if the whole of her old world were sweeping out of sight, leaving her alone with this man in a new! His arms were extended—the eager love in his eyes was a dazzling light that fairly blinded her! Oh, what would life be without her dream—why doubt—why struggle! Could any destiny be so hard as existence deprived of his affection? How could she bear to give him up? She must though—she must—she must end it now and here! Yet even as she was trying to think this, he cried again,—

"Georgia—Georgia!"

He was coming nearer—she could not bid him pause—in another instant he would take her in his embrace—if he did, she should have no strength to resist. She should speak the word that would give him a right to claim her, and once spoken, she knew that he would never let her take it back.

"No, no!" she faltered—saw Bourke's face change—his arms drop—and at the same

moment she heard her aunt's voice exclaim, "Georgia Grosvenor!"

She turned and saw Mrs Conyngham standing in the window that opened to the floor of the porch. In the distance sounded the railway whistle, sharp and shrill. Bourke had not a second to lose; he caught Georgia's hands; pressed his lips on them; snatched up his coat and valise, and dashed past Mrs Conyngham with a hasty salutation to which she paid no heed beyond an angry glare from two fierce eyes which, as he hurried by, fixed themselves again upon her niece.

"Georgia Grosvenor!" she exclaimed a second time.

Desperation nerved Georgia—the secret must be told now.

"Good morning, aunt," she said, with a composure which astonished herself. She could not be angry, stern and wrathful as was the countenance that met hers. She felt grateful to her relative for this opportune arrival; she had been saved from her own heart—she should never be so weak again.

"I did not hear you come," she added.

"Too pleasantly occupied," sneered Mrs Conyngham.

"Too seriously occupied at least," Georgia answered. She might have shrunk from anger, and so allowed her aunt to get the advantage, but the sneer and the sudden look of contempt gave her a little strength.

"So it should seem," returned Aunt Conyngham, freaking scorn for a majesty which was really quite awful. She entered the room; closed the window behind her, and sat down, still fixing her niece with that stony glare, and poor Georgia had a swift, vague thought that her feelings must be somewhat akin to those of a criminal in the dock when he sees the judge don his fatal black cap. "And now you will be good enough to explain the meaning of the extraordinary scene I interrupted," pursued Mrs Conyngham in her deepest, sternest voice, which gave Georgia, in her trouble, the sensation it used to do in the days of her opening girlhood, when she stood awaiting sentence for some misdemeanour at Aunt Conyngham's bar of justice. "This very disgraceful scene!" added the lady, noticing her niece's confusion, and venturing on a harsher blow.

But she had made a mistake—gone too far—she perceived that before the words had fairly left her lips.

Georgia moved towards her with a face which startled her aunt.

"Take back those words!" she said.

Mrs Conyngham struggled hard to look her down, but she felt herself cower before the wrathful splendour of Georgia's eyes.

"I believe you are crazy!" she exclaimed.

"Take back those words," repeated Georgia, "or you and I may both have reason to think me so. Take them back!"

"I do—I didn't mean it!" cried Aunt Conyngham. She covered her face with her handkerchief, and sobbed out, "You have broken my heart at last. Oh, I thank God your poor mother is in her grave!"

"So do I," said Georgia; "at least she is spared hearing her sister insult her child."

She was forced to sit; she trembled so that she could not stand. Anger—thankfulness that she had had no time to pronounce the word Denis wanted—a wild regret which burned her heart like flame to remember, that she must give up her dream, render him and herself wretched—a mad impatience against fate—against her over lack of courage—of honesty, of womanliness in not being brave enough to let her heart have its way—all these varying emotions left her positively faint and blind.

Mrs Conyngham watching her from behind the screen of her pocket handkerchief, was sufficiently keen and shrewd to gain some perception of the struggle in her mind, and to try and turn it to suit her own purpose. She was scarcely less moved than Georgia, for after her first spasm of rage had come the harrowing thought, that there had been grounds for Sybil Mayford's hints—Denis Bourke was dangerous. The bare idea that Georgia could be insane enough to care for him—to think of flinging away her brilliant future, gave Mrs Conyngham a pang of heart sickness almost like despair.

"Child, child!" she exclaimed, in a pleading

voice, "this is no time for you and me to quarrel! In heaven's name, tell me what it all means, and let me help you."

"I don't want any help," Georgia answered, forcing back a sob. This approach to tenderness unnerved her completely.

"At least you will explain—you must have enough sense of duty left to do that,"—Mrs Conyngham broke off; the choice of words was unfortunate, and began again. "You will grant so much, Georgia, to my affection."

"You know I shall never resist that claim, aunt," Georgia replied.

Another and still safer mode of treating the matter struck the astute lady. She rose, went up to Georgia, and stood behind her chair, laying her hand on the girl's head, and saying in a voice which she tried to render at once half playful and wholly sympathising,—

"My dear, I understand without any more words. That foolish Mr Bourke has been falling in love with you. It is not your fault. I know you are sorry for him. I know you did not think; so you must not reproach yourself! He has been crazy enough to speak, and it has frightened you and made you feel guilty. Ah, I wish you had given him a hint long ago of your engagement to Mr Caruthers."

When she began to speak, Georgia let her head drop back against her aunt's shoulder with a sensation of relief. She meant to be kind, and so would prove a help; but the words which

ended the speech, caused Georgia to start up with quick determination, while her trembling features grew hard again.

"I could have no reason for telling Mr Bourke a falsehood," she said; "I never was engaged to Mr Caruthers. I never gave him the slightest reason to hope that I ever should be."

"No reason to hope!" cried Mrs Conyngham, her anger rising anew. "What else did your taking months to consider his proposal mean? You tacitly engaged yourself to him—to retract now would be wanton, trifling, a deliberate sin; you are bound in honour to accept his hand."

"He understood from the first I was not pledged in any way. I told him there was no probability of my ever changing my mind."

"Ask him;—let us hear what he thinks."

"He has told me," Georgia answered quietly. She knew the moment had come when her aunt must hear the whole—the crisis gave her a certain composure.

"Oh, he has too much patience!" cried Aunt Conyngham. "I know—he is willing to give you more time—but it is wicked on your part to ask it. How you can treat him as you do, if you have any heart in your bosom, is a mystery to me."

"You are mistaken," said Georgia coldly. "I have told Mr Caruthers that I shall never marry him, but that has not disturbed our friendship."

Mrs Conyngham dropped into a chair, and sat

staring at her, with dazed, confused eyes—she positively could not believe her own ears.

"You mean you have told him you can't yet make up your mind," she said slowly.

"My mind was made up weeks back; almost as soon as it was I told Mr Caruthers that we could be friends, and only friends! I shall never marry him; the matter was definitely settled between us a good while since."

Aunt Conyngham was convinced; for the moment she could not speak; she gave one groan, and sat still.

"I hated to tell you," continued Georgia, really pitying her relative's terrible disappointment." We both agreed to wait till we got to town; but it is told now, and aunt, you must understand that the subject is at an end for ever."

A brief silence ensued; Georgia knew that no disappointment could have been severer to her relative than the overthrow of her long-cherished hope, and she would have given the world to offer some comforting words, but could find none.

The first numbness produced by the shock subsided; Mrs Conyngham rushed into a passion, such as Georgia had never seen her display.

"You abominable girl!" she exclaimed. "You wicked, wicked creature! Georgia Grosvenor, if you dare to add to your iniquity by telling me that you are so mad as to care for that beggarly Irishman—"

"Don't go any further!" interrupted Georgia.

"You will kill me!" sobbed Mrs Conyngham. "If you tell me you are so crazy as even to dream of marrying him, you will kill me!"

"Set your mind at rest—I shall never marry Mr Bourke," Georgia answered, deliberately and firmly, though, to hear her voice uttering the sentence aloud, roused a pang of anguish in her heart, which turned her dizzy and sick.

"Have you told him?" Mrs Conyngham gasped, with a slight feeling of relief.

"I shall say nothing more about Mr Bourke," said Georgia, "and, aunt, whatever secret of his you may suspect, you must betray to no human being—I warn you, I should not forgive it."

"You need not threaten me!" returned Mrs Conyngham, recovering herself enough to be reproachful in a dignified fashion; "I am not likely to allow anybody to suspect that he ever presumed so far as to care for you."

"Excuse me, aunt, but Mr Bourke's birth and education make that remark perfectly ludicrous," said Georgia. "However, we will not discuss him in any way; your sole interest is where I am concerned; I have no thought of marrying him."

And again that dolorous pang wrung her heart as she spoke his sentence—ah, and hers—hers!

Mrs Conyngham shed a few tears, partly because she was nervous, partly because a little weeping seemed a necessary preparation to getting down to more commonplace conversation. Her

ready mind grasped a plan before she had dried her eyes—the important thing was to get Georgia away at once.

"I have had news from town," she said, putting her handkerchief aside, and speaking with tolerable calmness. "I must go back—the business is important—I want to go to-morrow."

Georgia knew that it would be wisdom on her part to consent; but she could not leave Phillis at this juncture.

"Not to-morrow," she said; "Mrs Davis is unwell. I cannot leave Phillis till she is better."

"You have put everything out of my head by your dreadful talk!" cried Aunt Conyngham. "I've not even asked after Sybil Mayford."

"Report says she spent a good night—I have not seen her myself."

"Is she ready? I have come to take her back."

"I will show you to her room—she will see you doubtless—I fancy she is ready."

As they passed down the hall they met Phillis, who had come out of Mrs Mayford's chamber. The sight of the girl roused new anger in Aunt Conyngham's mind; to have Maurice's insanity added to Georgia's crimes, seemed too much for endurance. But she was obliged to be cordial for fear Maurice should hear of it, and asked with great interest after the grandmother.

"She is only tired," Phillis said; "she will be quite herself by evening."

"I am so glad! I am obliged to go to town to-morrow on important business. Of course Georgia must go too, and she hated the idea of leaving you if there was any fear of your grandmother's being ill."

"I don't mean to go to-morrow, Phil," said Georgia.

"You nonsensical child!" exclaimed Mrs Conyngham, with a nervous laugh. "You must go, and Maurice too—the business is partly his."

Georgia saw an expression of relief cross Phillis's face; but they were at Mrs Mayford's door, and she did not speak.

The widow received her friend rapturously; insisted on Georgia's coming in, and was so sweet to her and Phillis, that if there had been any possible mischief for the creature to work, Georgia could have sworn she was contemplating it.

She vowed she had never rested better in her life; had fallen asleep the moment her head touched the pillow, and her ankle really seemed benefited by the exertion of the previous day—with the aid of a stick she could walk across the room. Her placidity was even proof against the annoyance of learning that Mr Caruthers had allowed some business matter to prevent his coming to see her home.

"If you are so strong and energetic, you will be able to start for town to-morrow," said Mrs Conyngham. "It is lucky, because we are obliged to go."

"All of you?" asked the widow.

"Yes; Mr Caruthers has news too," said Mrs Conyngham, and, as she had expected, it was evident this information at once decided the lady to find strength to depart also.

Georgia persisted in her intention of remaining, but Aunt Conyngham still treated this as a jest. She had encountered Maurice near the station, and he told her that he should ride over to Wachuset after seeing Bourke off; she trusted to convincing him of the necessity for inducing Georgia to leave the Nest before that gentleman's return, and believed that the wayward girl could not resist her brother's persuasions.

When the visitors had gone, Phillis said,—

"I must go up to Denis's house, Georgia. Look in now and then on grandma; but don't stop, because she ought to sleep."

"Must you go, Phil?"

"Yes; this is my best opportunity — your brother won't be back for a couple of hours. I must go; I could only stay a few moments this morning, and I fear that—he—is very ill—I must go."

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER the train had gone, Peyton rode over to Wachuset, partly to fulfil a commission for his friend, but more to pass the time until Phillis's afternoon leisure should give him an opportunity to see her alone.

As he entered the town his horse cast a shoe, so he left him at a blacksmith's shop, receiving a promise that the roan should be conducted to the hotel when the misfortune had been repaired.

Maurice attended to Bourke's business, which detained him until it was close upon the hour at which his aunt had told him she should return.

He met the president of the bank who stopped to exchange salutations, and added,—

"I had the honour of a visit from Miss Grosvenor this morning—she came in herself to cash your cheque. If she means to distribute that among our poor people, on the top of what you and she have already given, you two will have indeed been a Providence in our neighbourhood."

After a few more words Peyton passed on,

thinking what a very odd thing it was for Georgia to have drawn the money; he had supposed that she wanted to send the cheque to town in payment of some bill. Certainly she could not afford to bestow in charity even a quarter of the amount, and the idea of keeping so many hundred dollars by her in a place where opportunities for spending money were fewer than in any spot he had ever discovered, seemed utterly preposterous.

But he was near the hotel, and the sight of the carriage driving up, with Mrs Conyngham and the widow therein, put the matter out of his mind. He hurried forward to assist them to alight and help Mrs Mayford up to her room. It needed only one glance at his aunt's face to perceive that she was in a state of intense excitement, but as the widow appeared unusually gay and satisfied, he concluded that she had been worrying his relative beyond the bounds of patience—probably by abuse of Georgia and himself.

As soon as Mrs Mayford was comfortably established on her sofa, Aunt Conyngham said,—

"Now we must leave you to rest for a while. I will send Rosalie in; I want to speak to Maurice for a few moments."

"Good-bye, you naughty boy," said the widow, in her softest, most languid tones. "I thought pretty Miss French looking pale this morning. I hope you have not begun torment-

ing her already. I am sure, just at present, she has enough to disturb her without any help on your part."

As soon as they were in the corridor, and the door of her chamber closed behind them, Maurice exclaimed,—

"By Jove! Aunt Conyngham, you will either have to clip that cat's claws, or if you persist in keeping her about, she will drive everybody else away from your vicinity."

"There are worse things than sharp speeches to endure in this world," replied Mrs Conyngham, in a voice full of meaning.

Maurice knew there was a storm in the air, and hastily decided that if his relative meant to expostulate or lecture, she had chosen her time very ill; he felt too anxious and impatient this morning to bear interference upon any subject.

They found Rosalie in Mrs Conyngham's parlour, and her mistress bade her go to the invalid's room.

"See first if Mr Caruthers has come in," she added, "and ask him not to leave the house till I have seen him."

Maurice smiled privately at his aunt's tone and manner, but seated himself in an easy-chair, and waited. Rosalie took her departure. Mrs Conyngham threw off her bonnet and shawl, sat down opposite her nephew, and regarded him with her most solemn expression.

"May I have a cigarette?" he asked, appa-

rently unobservant of her looks. She made a gesture of assent, waited an instant, still fixing him with dismayed and horrified eyes, but as it became evident he did not mean to ask the cause of her agitation, she said in a trembling voice,—

"I hardly know where to begin! Never, never in my life, have I passed a morning so dreadful!"

"I should think your long experience of the Mayford would have accustomed you to annoyances," said Maurice, lazily puffing a cloud of white smoke into the air.

"Don't jest, Maurice; by the time I finish I think you will feel as little inclined to as I do myself!" she exclaimed. "Do you know what Georgia has done?"

"No," said Maurice.

"She has refused Mr Caruthers — refused him!" groaned Aunt Conyngham.

Maurice was surprised, but he was thinking more of Phillis's perspicacity than anything else. He had not believed her correct the day she insisted that Georgia had done so.

"It seems a pity in many ways," he said slowly; "but, aunt, if she can't make up her mind to like him—"

"Oh!" broke in Mrs Conyngham with profound disdain, "don't begin that romantic rubbish you have lately learned to talk; you don't mean it, and at bottom you know you do not. For you to amuse yourself is one thing—to sit by and

permit your sister to wreck her future is another."

"I don't see that refusing Mr Caruthers must necessarily involve that catastrophe," returned Maurice obstinately.

This insinuation in regard to the lightness of his feeling for Phillis angered him, but he resolved not to gratify his relative by showing it.

"Do you know why she has refused him?" demanded Mrs Conyngham.

"Because she doesn't like him, I suppose!'

"Because she has listened to that moon-struck Irishman of yours, until she is in a state when a lunatic asylum would be the fit place for her," his aunt exclaimed, losing her last vestige of self-control. "I found her this morning almost in his arms. He was calling her by her Christian name. He was—oh! I can't bear to think of it!"

"Do you mean she is going to marry Denis Bourke?" asked Maurice, now indeed interested —astonished too.

"Not so bad as that, thank heaven!" cried Mrs Conyngham. "She has promised me she will not."

"Then I don't perceive why you need be unhappy," replied Maurice, half gratified, half disappointed.

He would have thought it a great risk for Georgia to run, but he would have admired her exceedingly had she determined to do so.

"Because if she insists on staying here, she

will end by going completely insane," said Mrs Conyngham; and Maurice forebore to remind her that she had just declared such to be already the case. "If we can only persuade her to go! I have told her I must start to-morrow—come too—say you will, Maurice, then she can have no excuse. Help me to get her away before that man comes back!"

"I don't wish to go myself at present," he answered.

"Oh! it was an evil hour when she heard of this place—for her—for you—for all of us!" his aunt exclaimed.

"Gently!" returned Maurice in a tone of repressed anger.

"I know you will be furious—but you will have to be convinced," Mrs Conyngham hurried on. "The sooner Georgia is out of reach of Miss French's society the better."

"If you say one word more—one syllable against the woman I have asked to be my wife, you and I part for ever!" said Maurice, in a slow, deep voice, more impressive than any outburst of passion.

"Ask Phillis French who the man was she went out to meet at midnight!" cried Mrs Conyngham. "Ask—"

"Ah, we have got to catty's tracks at last!" broke in Maurice contemptuously. "Denis Bourke and I were in the garden—Georgia too."

"Yes, I know that! But before you came

there was another man there—he ran away when you appeared."

"That is a flight of the gentle Mayford's fancy," said Maurice calmly, but as he spoke, a recollection of the person secreted in Bourke's house flashed across his mind.

"Sybil saw him. She had been frightened by voices. She got to the window—saw Bourke."

"Ah, I told you so!"

"Wait! She saw Phillis French crying and wringing her hands; Bourke tried to comfort her; then she went up to this man—they walked away together—Bourke left them alone for full twenty minutes."

There was a swift whirl of troubled thought in Maurice's brain; some secret had been kept from him—a secret of Phillis's—but Georgia and Bourke knew it—they must! Phillis's own words, Bourke's vague talk, always directed against Maurice's hopes, as Maurice had believed, because his friend did not credit him with serious intentions, but which might apply to this secret—all these things coursed through his mind. He could not wait; he must see Georgia—see Phillis! He rose quickly.

"You and I will talk no more this morning, aunt," he said. "I don't blame you very much; your infatuation for your malicious friend blinds your judgment."

"You can't blame her this time, Maurice; it was her duty to tell me! No woman has a right to place herself in an equivocal position. Miss

French must explain ; any person in the world would say the same," cried Mrs Conyngham.

"It is due to Miss French that Sybil Mayford's coarse expressions should be refuted, and they shall be," returned Maurice haughtily. "I depend on you to see that they go no further. I warn you. I shall hold you responsible if Mrs Mayford repeats them."

"Let Phillis French clear herself; nobody could be more glad than I," said Mrs Conyngham, but her tone was too triumphant ; it expressed plainly her conviction that the girl would not be able to set herself right.

"You insult her by the proposal," cried Maurice. "Miss French shall never hear of what has happened if I can help it."

He caught up his hat ; turned to the door.

"Maurice, Maurice, you will persuade Georgia to go," pleaded his aunt ; "for her own sake—think, only think!"

"When Mrs Mayford has to eat her vile words, there will be time enough to talk of that! Georgia shall not go while that wretch could say she went away because of this slander," returned Peyton.

"Maurice!" his aunt called again, but the door closed behind him without his paying any attention to her appeal.

Mrs Conyngham knew that it would be useless to follow ; he would not listen. She must hasten to Mrs Mayford, obtain her promise to say nothing to Mr Caruthers at present. But by the time her troubled mind arrived at this thought,

she had wasted precious moments in impotent despair over her helplessness to save the brother and sister from the consequences of their folly.

As she was about to leave her room, Mr Caruthers knocked, saying as he entered,—

"Rosalie says you wish to see me; I have just left Mrs Mayford."

Mrs Conyngham knew that he had already heard the tale.

"Oh, don't let Maurice find out that you know; he would never forgive me!" she cried incoherently.

"I am not likely to tell any one," he answered. "But we must be just—for once Mrs Mayford has done right—as she says, there can be no doubt that Miss French is deceiving your niece, and urging her generous nature on to something she may bitterly regret."

Mrs Conyngham could not forbear bursting into reproaches at his folly in having hid from her the true state of affairs between Georgia and himself.

"She asked me to leave the disclosure to her; I had no right to refuse," he said.

"Oh, one may carry delicate scruples too far," cried Aunt Conyngham, goaded into a recklessness of speech which startled him, it was so unlike her usual self.

"At least I am glad she has told you," he said mildly.

"She would not have done it if she could have helped. I saw that Bourke bidding her

good-bye," rejoined Mrs Conyngham, stopping short; she was revealing more than she intended.

"Has Mr Bourke gone away?" Caruthers asked, his voice quiet as ever, though his countenance showed that her words had cut him deeply.

"Yes; won't be back till to-morrow night," Mrs Conyngham hurried on. "I want to get Georgia away before he comes; you must help me! Oh, I have quite lost my head! But she does not mean to marry him; she has told me that—promised me."

Mr Caruthers's eyes brightened with a ray of hope. He sat down opposite Mrs Conyngham, and said,—

"We must try to talk calmly, and see our way, my dear friend."

"Oh, if you had only trusted me a fortnight ago," cried she. "But it is useless to go back to that. Tell me just how you stand with that crazy girl. I could make nothing out of her account."

He did tell her—told her what his trust was in time, in Georgia's own clear sense, when this transitory illusion should have passed, and Aunt Conyngham felt comforted, and seized eagerly upon his idea, going speedily far beyond him in her hopefulness.

Maurice rode away, beset by suspicious fancies, the more wearing, because too vague, to find any basis on which they could either settle

or be disputed. There was a mystery—he could not avoid that conclusion—but Bourke shared it with Phillis and Georgia also. He knew that his sister must have wanted the money for her friend. This explained the matter of her cashing the cheque.

Did Phillis require it for this man hidden in Bourke's house? Time and again, Denis had told him she had not a debt; whence could have come such sudden need for a sum so large, considering her means for its repayment, unless to give this stranger? Who could he be? Her father was dead; she had not a relative in the world, except her grandmother. Oh, in that past life, of which he knew so little, in these girlish days of affluence, of a wider experience than her present, had there been some secret which now thurst itself importunately forward? No, no; he would not think it. But Bourke's grave warnings—puzzling words Phillis had several times spoken lately, when he succeeded in forcing her to talk seriously—all came back, and assumed a new and startling significance.

But his thoughts seemed an outrage to the woman he loved; he was furious with himself, ashamed. He had meant to go to the Nest; but he would return home and wait till he got quiet. To question Phillis would be an unpardonable insult; still he must tell Georgia that Sybil Mayford had overheard the stranger's voice—of course it was merely that Phillis was interested in this *protégé* of Bourke's—only that! Denis

ought to have trusted him—Phillis too. But he refused to dwell upon this lack of confidence, overwhelmed by remorse at his own unworthiness, as proved by the fact that Sybil Mayford's revelations could disturb him for an instant.

When he reached the post-office he turned into a road which led to Bourke's house, without passing the Nest. He would punish himself for his thoughts of the last half-hour; he had erred enough. Phillis was doubtless already angry with him for his hasty words of the previous night. She had reason to be; he was a wretch, almost as vile as Sybil Mayford herself? But at heart he had not suspected—never could doubt her—his one love, his darling, his life. And he should yet win her. He was not half worthy, but he would try to become so. He put his doubts resolutely by; he dwelt on his affection; he recalled her looks, her talk, filling his mind with images of her as she appeared in her varying moods, now gay, now wistful and dreamy,—always bewitching, always his treasure, his pearl of women!

He reached the lane leading to the stables—he would ride in there. Joe Grimshaw was sure to be about them at that hour, and he could save the boy the trouble of coming to the house. He felt eager to oblige any and everybody; to be gentle and kind to the whole world, and the very revulsion of feeling sent his spirits up to fever-heat. As he expected, he saw Joe standing in the barn-door, and was so good-natured,

that the boy decided he grew pleasanter every day.

"Hanged ef he ain't a man a chap 'ud go into the fire fur," thought Joe, as he watched him walk away. "You might hunt a week o' Sundays and not find his match, unless you happened to run agin Mr Bourke. They go in a team mighty even, and no mistake."

Maurice could see Mistress Tabitha busy in her kitchen as he passed; in the verandah at the back of the house old Patrick was sitting, but he had been up late the night before, and had fallen asleep in his chair. Maurice trod on tiptoe in order not to wake him, entered the hall, and was going up to his room, when it occurred to him that he would first smoke a tranquil pipe in the little room off the parlour.

He opened the door; the curtains were drawn, and amid the shadows he saw Phillis French seated in an arm-chair. At her feet knelt a man with his face turned so as to be visible to Peyton—a face strange to him, but which in that terrible moment of watching seemed to burn its likeness indelibly upon his brain. A man who in the uncertain light looked young, handsome, even elegant; but with the undefinable air of a creature at war with society—who had violated its most stringent laws, and was ready to do so again; who, if an amnesty had been granted, and an opportunity given to live at peace with his kind, could no more have kept the truce than a leopard could refrain from rending his prey.

So deeply absorbed were both, that the opening of the door did not rouse them. When Maurice recovered tangible thought after the instant which widened so illimitably, that it held agony enough to have filled a whole life, he was about to step back and retire unperceived, but the mortal anguish which seemed rending body and soul asunder, wrung from his lips a low groan.

The man started to his feet, Phillis French to hers; her glance was directed towards the door now, and she perceived Maurice. She moved forward like a person walking in sleep, one hand extended, her eyes staring straight before her, yet appearing to see nothing.

Mechanically Maurice retreated into the parlour—mechanically she followed. His hand released its hold upon the door so suddenly that it swung too as Phillis passed, and closed with a noise which sounded like thunder in the ears of both.

She must tell the whole now—the whole terrible story of disgrace. How could she for a second have dreamed there was a possibility of his not shrinking away from her afterwards. And yet she knew that she had so dreamed from the day he had spoken out his love in the presence of others—she had not realised that she was so dreaming, but she knew it at this crisis, which held the necessity for revelation, and she knew that her dream had been a mad impossibility.

She must tell ; she could trust to his honour to keep silence ; but once the confession uttered, they could not be more widely separated during all time to come, if death and the grave had suddenly swept between.

Before she could articulate a syllable, he spoke,—

"You warned me that your life held a secret, now I know what it was—what it is!"

"You know!" she echoed.

He had pronounced her sentence in those words—she read that in his face—realised too that her heart was breaking.

"You might have sent me away—you might have spared me this!" he groaned.

"I couldn't spare myself," she muttered, but so low that he did not catch the sense. He only saw her lips move, then shut firmly together. She was so stony, so rigid, that in his horrible misery and insane wrath, it seemed as if she were defying him—so callous, that neither his despair nor his contempt could move her.

"Your secret is safe with me—I need hardly tell you that," he said.

"Then for so much let me thank you," she answered slowly, lifting her hand in a gesture of dismissal. A black cloud wavered before her eyes, through which she saw him dimly. She was near fainting for the first time in her life—he must not witness this sign of her suffering. He had cast her off—she should die or go mad with shame later, if by any weakness she con-

fessed her love and betrayed her breaking heart.

"Oh, I'll go!" he cried. "Don't be afraid of a scene. I recognise that I have no rights—they belong to him," and he pointed towards the adjoining room—face and gesture so full of scorn that her dull brain comprehended he did not know the truth! She believed he had in his rage snatched at an interpretation of the scene, injurious, insulting to herself—forgetting that her manner, her words, forced such conviction upon him. The faintness passed; every nerve seemed to turn to steel in its tension.

"Yes, they belong to him!" she repeated.

"May God forgive you!" he said. "I think I never can!"

"Don't you ever dare!" she cried, gazing straight into his face, with eyes more fiery than his own.

"And you let me love you—you let me hope!"

"You love? You don't know the meaning of the word," she answered. "I warned you long since that I meant to give you a lesson—you have had it—now go!"

Her pitiless bravado, her hardened triumph—so they seemed to him—heightened his wrath till it momentarily overpowered his pain; left him outwardly cold and calm, but no more capable of knowing what he said than if he had gone actually insane.

"You can do one thing—"

"And now he means to ask a favour from *me*," she broke in.

"An act of justice—of right feeling—if you are capable of either," he retorted.

"I am not!" she exclaimed. "I am not!"

"Why, what woman are you?" he cried. "Revenge yourself on me because I loved you, if you will — but don't punish Georgia — she deserves something at your hands."

"Oh, I understand. You want her to leave my house? I am not fit company for her; she shall not sleep another night under my roof, be sure of that—I'll tell her!"

"Ah, don't tell her anything—leave her her illusion. Let the story, whatever it was, with which you have satisfied her and Denis, be her belief still. She would suffer so—she has a heart—she loves you. Why, she'd have died sooner than ask me—"

He stopped; crazed as he was, he knew that some words about the money had been on his lips—he could not stoop to speak of that. But he had said enough—she understood.

"She lent me eighteen hundred dollars; she got it from you! O my God! she dared to help me with money that came from you!"

"I know nothing about such matters—"

"Oh, the gallant falsehood!" she interrupted. "It is too late to waste any attempt at being chivalrous! She got the money from you! Oh, I thought I could bear anything, but this is too much! Do you wait here!"

She ran out of the room; he heard her go upstairs. He could not stop to think what her errand might be. He was fighting against a score of devils that were tugging at him, trying to push him forward in search of that man—to kill him before her eyes! She returned just as he was about to yield to the influence impelling him on. Before she could speak, he cried,—

"Do you love him?"

"Yes," she answered.

His arms dropped to his side—a glaze came over the fire in his eyes.

"That's all," he muttered; "good-bye—for ever!"

"First take your money!" she exclaimed, and flung the roll of bank notes at his feet.

He was gone—the door shut. She tried to call—to pick up the roll and follow him—but her limbs gave way. She tottered back and forth, then sank slowly to the floor—not fainting—even the temporary relief of insensibility was denied; but for many moments she lay there, incapable of movement, as if smitten by paralysis, which left only her soul active, keen, staring out at its own misery.

CHAPTER X.

GRANDMA still slept. Georgia stole into her room several times to make sure that she had not wakened, then resumed her dreary march up and down the verandah, which she had been pacing during these long two hours of solitude.

Her own troubles and uncertainties only made a dull, aching undercurrent in her thoughts; her mind was too thoroughly absorbed in Phillis's strait to have room for any other active reflection. She was so fretted by the girl's long absence that she would have gone in search of her, had she not felt certain Maurice would come by the Nest on his return, and she must detain him until there would be no danger of his finding Phillis at Bourke's house.

He must be told the dismal story, but not yet—not until Denis Bourke's guest was far away, and Phillis at least left far from this outward anxiety, which had so suddenly thrust itself forward from the gloom of the past. She heard the sound of wheels; looked out and saw

Mr Caruthers driving up to the gate in an open pony carriage. There was no groom with him; he descended, fastened the horses to a post, and entered the grounds.

His appearance gave Georgia a sensation of relief; he would be gentle and kind, and his companionship would afford her a temporary comfort and rest. She walked down the path to meet him, saying as she got near,—

"I was all alone, and so tired of my own society—it is very good of you to have come. Grandma Davis is not well, and Miss French is occupied."

He took her hand, looking at her with a cordial smile; inwardly he was a good deal agitated, for he realised that unless Georgia could be persuaded to go away at once, utter ruin might befall the fresh fabric of hope which he had so laboriously erected; but there was no sign of disquiet in face or voice as he said,—

"You do not look very well yourself. I am glad I happened on the right moment for coming."

"Oh, I am quite well—only tired, though I have done nothing," she answered.

"Sometimes that is the most fatiguing business possible," he said. "Your aunt told me that Mrs Davis was indisposed—nothing serious, I trust?"

"Oh no; she made a little too much exertion yesterday," Georgia explained. "So you have seen my aunt?"

"Yes," he replied. "Indeed, my visit is partly made at her request."

"Oh, she wants me to go away to-morrow," cried Georgia, "but I cannot. It would be unkind to leave Phillis so suddenly—just now too!"

"Just now?" he repeated inquiringly. He did not mean to betray the fact that he had heard from Mrs Mayford of a stranger's interview with Phillis on the previous night, but he wanted if possible to discover by what story she had satisfied Georgia. He tried to be just; but, with his preconceived dislike and distrust of Miss French, he could not help putting almost as severe a construction upon her conduct as did the widow herself. "Why just now?"

"When grandma is not well," Georgia said quickly. "You know how kind they have both been to me; it would seem very ungrateful on my part to leave them at such a time."

"But since her indisposition is not serious!"

"Oh, at her age one never can tell!" cried Georgia. "No, no, Mr Caruthers—don't let my aunt tease me—surely she can wait a few days longer!"

"The business which calls her back is—is very important," he said.

"Then she must leave me behind," returned Miss Grosvenor.

"Do you think it wise on your part to be left?" he asked gently, but the eyes which regarded her were very grave.

Georgia knew that her aunt had given him some hint of the scene with Denis Bourke which her arrival had interrupted. She felt herself colour under his penetrating glance, but answered steadily and truthfully,—

"Indeed, I am not thinking about myself at all—only of Phillis and grandma!"

"But if Mrs Davis is quite well again by evening—"

"Indeed, indeed, I cannot go to-morrow, Mr Caruthers," she interrupted. Then she reflected that he must unavoidably suppose her influenced by some personal reason—perhaps where Denis was concerned! She must remove this impression. Yet even to him she could not entrust the secret that her determination rose from the impossibility of leaving Phillis alone at this juncture. She could not go until that man got safely off, and Bourke had said that a delay of several days might be necessary. "I assure you, if I consulted my own wishes, I should go gladly," she continued. "I was very much disappointed when Mrs Mayford's accident prevented me starting at the time we had set. I want to go, believe me. I will do so the moment it is possible."

After all she had spoken too eagerly, said too much; she saw this by the expression of his face as she looked up at him again.

"I am placed in a difficult position," he replied slowly; "yet I should be unfaithful to the friendship you have accepted if I did not say what I think. Am I going too far—

must you tell me that there are things even the truest and most devoted friend ought not to say?"

"No; whatever it may be!" returned Georgia firmly, as the blush died out of her face, and left her somewhat pale. "I told you that I considered you the truest, the dearest male friend I have in the world. I should be false to my word, and unworthy of your friendship, if I could not listen patiently and gratefully to anything you may think right to tell me."

"That is noble and generous! Ah, you understand what friendship really means," he said, with a sad smile.

"Don't call me generous; it makes me ashamed!" she cried, with her usual impulsiveness. "Now tell me what is in your mind. No; I am restless, and would rather walk up and down the path," she added, as he invited her by gesture to sit down on a bench near.

"As you like," he said, with one of his ceremonious bows. He did not offer her his arm, but they strolled along side by side under the maple trees that burned brightly still with their splendour of autumn colouring. He did not hesitate; he spoke slowly, but only as if anxious to weigh each word before it was uttered. "To another woman, I might have to begin by excuses —explanations—she might think me influenced by selfish motives under a show of care for your peace—but you will not."

"I shall not," Georgia answered.

She knew that he was going to speak of Denis Bourke—to point out more plainly than he had ever done, the risk she ran by any dalliance with her dream—the life-long regret and remorse she would lay up for herself if she were guilty of any weakness, and she felt that his counsels would aid her at this exigency. Aunt Conyngham's openly worldly advice would only have irritated her; but Mr Caruthers's arguments would cover the ground on which she wished to place herself—came like an actual and visible exterior support at this juncture, when she so much needed such aid.

"The greatest kindness you can show is to go away; if possible to go away without seeing our brave, dear friend again. Your aunt gave me to understand that she saw and heard on his part, what proved he was openly pleading his own cause—whether she did right or wrong in letting me discover this, we need not discuss. Georgia, dear, honoured lady, do not trust your heart beyond its strength. Your will has never consented to any affection on your side; you must let it guide you; else, in a moment of pardonable weakness, you may be led to wreck your life and his—his! If you could contemplate the sacrifice of your own future, you cannot wrong him."

Ah, that was what she wanted to be reminded of. He had chosen the very ground on which she must stand. The language did not even sound ponderous as he uttered

it, because face and voice were eloquent with feeling.

"If there were hope for his future, I would be the first to bid you wait, if you could once convince yourself that your dream might, if permitted, ripen into a sentiment so strong, it would enable you to bear the sacrifice of passing the best years of your life in obscurity—what would be actual privation to your tastes and habits. But there is no hope. I admire and respect Denis Bourke with all my soul, but I know, and you know, that his beautiful aspirations are impossible of fulfilment."

Unconsciously, and in the energy of his speech, he had paused under the maples, which whispered softly in the breeze—unconsciously she paused too. He looked anxiously at her.

"I want to hear," she said in a low voice.

The arguments were not new; she had gone over them again and again, but they acquired new force, thus spoken aloud by one whom she could trust, in whose judgment she had confidence.

"Run no risk," he continued, as they walked on; "I mean for him. Go away, Georgia, go away at once, and leave behind a response so definite, that he will know it would be useless to follow you."

"I will! I will!" she said. "If I could leave before he comes back, I would—but I must stay. There is a reason, I can't tell it to you—it has nothing to do with him. I mustn't say

any more! Persuade my aunt to wait—do you wait too, good, kind friend! You can quiet my aunt—just a day or two."

They heard the sound of a horse's hoofs dashing furiously round a curve in the road.

"It is Maurice," said Mr Caruthers. "Good heavens! what a break-neck pace he rides at."

Peyton checked his horse at the gate, tied him, and hurried in. Georgia and Mr Caruthers went to meet him. The instant they saw his face clearly, a simultaneous dread smote them; a week's severe illness could not have changed it more than this last half-hour had done.

"Maurice, Maurice, what is the matter?" Georgia cried.

"Matter? nothing!" he exclaimed hoarsely, with a dreadful laugh. "I'm going away, that's all."

"Where—what for?" asked Georgia eagerly. Maurice's blind eyes perceived her companion.

"Hallo, Caruthers!" he said. "Tell the aunt she will see me in town—to-morrow night, maybe. I say, Georgia, you'd better go with her; you must, in fact."

"Not to-morrow," cried Georgia. "Have you seen Phillis?"

"Yes, I've seen her!" he exclaimed furiously,—controlled himself, glanced at Caruthers, laughed again that awful laugh. "I say, I beg both your pardons; I'm not tipsy, just a little off my head with hurry."

"If you are leaving, you will be glad to see

your sister alone for a few moments," said Mr Caruthers. "Good-bye; we shall meet in town; Miss Grosvenor, shall I tell your aunt you will go to-morrow?"

"Yes, yes. The sooner the better," cried Maurice.

"Not to-morrow," pleaded Georgia, sick and faint with dread, as she studied her brother's countenance.

"I say yes!" he exclaimed imperiously.

"Tell my aunt I will see her, or write to her to-night, Mr Caruthers," said Georgia. Her eyes besought him to go; he knew it was the kindest thing he could do. He bowed, went quickly down the path, got into the carriage, and drove off, certain that Maurice had discovered some secret of Phillis French's, and that the discovery had parted him from her irrevocably.

"In heaven's name, Maurice, what has happened?" groaned Georgia. "What have you said to Phillis?"

"What has she said to me, you mean!" he cried. "Here, talking is of no use. I'm going! I want a good gallop to clear my head; perhaps I shall ride to some town and wait for the train."

"You can't go like this—you sha'n't," pleaded Georgia in agony. "Did Phillis tell you—"

"Let me alone!" he interrupted. "Can't you see I'm down in hell? Don't drive me quite mad! O my God! I'm a brute to speak to you like this. I didn't mean it!" he cried, pressing his burning lips to her cheek. "There,

let me go; you know the gallop is the only thing for me."

"But you will come back?"

"Come back! Not if the rest of the earth were to fall to pieces!"

"But I can't let you go—I shall die of anxiety. And your things and—"

"I'll telegraph—don't be worried! I shall be all right after a ride."

She clung to him in her terrified pain; but he pushed her gently away.

"Let me go," he said. "It is the only way to show me kindness. I must be alone for awhile; good-bye, dear, good-bye!"

He kissed her again, rushed off, mounted his horse, waived his hand to her, and rode away at a tolerably moderate pace, able to think connectedly enough to remember that he was alarming her cruelly. Georgia returned to the house; Phillis had not come. She was just starting in search of her, when grandma woke and rang the handbell, that had been placed within her reach, and Georgia had to control her fright and pain and go to her.

CHAPTER XI.

LONG before Phillis's paralysis-like weakness would permit her to rise, her mind had seized upon a plan of action. The money—she must have the money! Disgrace, death—anything rather than touch the sum which had reached her through Maurice Peyton's bounty!

She must get to Wachuset—it was still early in the afternoon—she knew what to do! Oh, should she never be able to stir?—would her will never conquer that sluggish, benumbed body?

She managed at last to get upon her knees—saw the roll of bank-notes lying on the floor near her. The sight roused a kind of frenzied strength. She seized the packet, shuddering as if she had grasped some noxious reptile, thrust it into the pocket of her gown, and struggled to her feet. A strange lustre flashed into her eyes, a hectic colour dyed her cheeks. She went into the next room; it was empty. She caught up her hat and shawl which lay upon a chair, put

them on, and went out into the hall. She was trembling still—shivering with cold.

"This won't do," she muttered; "this won't do."

She entered the dining-room, opened the sideboard, and took out a decanter of sherry—drank a glass, ate some biscuits, hurried past old Patrick still sleeping in the porch, and walked quickly down the lane to the stables. She was strong enough now; her face wore an expression of such indomitable resolve that it looked hard, as if cut from stone.

"Joe—Joe Grimshaw!" she called.

Out came Joe. He had been to the house, and only came back in time to find that Mr Peyton had saddled a fresh horse, and was mounting. He rode away without a word, leaving Joe in a state of bewilderment at such inexplicable conduct.

"What's wanted, Miss Phillis?" he asked.

"I must go to Wachuset; I can't wait to go home and have the pony harnessed. Put Whitefoot to the buggy. I'll drive him; you know Mr Bourke often lets me."

"Oh, laud's sake! it's all right enough; if you want the hoss you kin have him," said Joe. "Did you see Mr Peyton? It's the queerest thing. He rode up a while ago as chipper as you please, and started to the house; 'n I went fur a bucket, and when I got back he was a-ridin' off agin lick-it-a-split!"

"Oh, hurry, Joe! I must get to Wachuset

by four o'clock!" cried Phillis, paying no attention to his words.

Joe gave her one inquiring glance, then rushed off to do her bidding, using such despatch that the horse and waggon were soon ready.

"Hadn't I better go with you?" he asked.

She shook her head, got into the carriage, and drove down the lane, leaving Joe lost in wonder as to what had come to both her and Mr Peyton.

"Mabby it's a row," thought Joe at length; "folks as is sweet on each other doos have 'em. But, my eye, if Miss Phillis and Peyton get up one, won't it be a peeler, jist!"

As Phillis turned into the high road, Mr Caruthers reached the entrance to Bourke's grounds, and saw her drive off in the direction of Wachuset. He had left some maps with Bourke, which he should want in case he went to town the next day, though he feared Mrs Conyngham's plan of forcing Georgia to go would fail, even when aided by influence so powerful as that of her brother.

Maurice had made some discovery in regard to Phillis French—some terrible and shocking discovery, too; nothing else could have roused him to a pitch of such insane fury. Mr Caruthers, in spite of his magnanimity, was human; he could not help reflecting that he had never approved of the girl, and gave himself credit for his clear-sightedness.

He walked up the winding path to the house

and knocked several times at the door, but without success. Old Patrick had wakened from his nap, so indignant at having slept in the day-time, that he started forth to see what Joe Grimshaw was about, and gave him a scolding, whatever it might be; for he felt in a belligerent mood, which must vent itself a little on somebody, and experience had taught him that it would not be safe to attack Mistress Tabitha in her own domain.

Mr Caruthers, tired of performing a symphony with the knocker, tried the door; finding it locked, he decided to go round to the back of the dwelling and seek admittance.

The kitchen was shut from view by two rows of weeping willows, extending to the top of the lane that led towards the stables. As Mr Caruthers approached, he saw a man walking to and fro under the trees, and involuntarily paused and regarded him, certain this must be the stranger of whom Sybil Mayford had spoken. His appearance accounted for Miss French's visit — she had been holding an interview with this mysterious guest of Denis Bourke's.

Mr Caruthers could see the countenance distinctly; it looked older than it had done by the dim light in which Maurice Peyton had seen it, but handsome enough to be noticeable, still more so from its expression; recklessness, resolution, craft and daring, were all imprinted upon it. He moved slowly, with a wild, animal

freedom and grace. Twice he stopped and pressed his hand against his breast, breathing fast and with an effort, evidently suffering from physical pain.

Mr Caruthers possessed a wonderful memory for faces; he knew this one was familiar to him, though what his associations were therewith, he could not recall. He walked on; at the sound of his footsteps the man turned quickly, and disappeared among the trees.

Mr Caruthers found Tabitha in the kitchen; explained his errand, and she showed him into the smoking-room, where, as he expected, he discovered the maps upon a table. He took them and departed—Tabitha letting him out by the front door—a little uneasy from first to last, as he remarked with his lawyer's habit of observing trifles.

He drove on towards Wachuset; in the distance he could see Phillis French in her open buggy, urging Whitefoot forward at a rapid pace. He sought in vain to remember when and where he had before encountered that stranger; yet he could have sworn it had happened during the pursuance of his professional duties — could almost have sworn that the troubled eyes had gazed out at him from the criminal's dock.

However this might be, the man was secretly established in Bourke's dwelling, and in some-way connected with Phillis French. His coming had at least brought about one fortunate result

—Maurice had escaped from the dangerous girl's thraldom.

He entered the hotel, intending to seek Mrs Conyngham and give her an account of his conversation with Georgia, but a waiter handed him some letters in the hall, and he turned aside into the reading-room to examine his correspondence. The epistles contained nothing of importance, and while perusing them his mind was still occupied with conjectures in regard to Denis Bourke's visitor.

A pile of newspapers lay on the table, which he had found no leisure to read in the morning. He picked up a *New York Herald*, and glanced at the political news, the state of the money-market—then a letter from a New Orleans correspondent attracted his attention. It contained an account of a man called Henry Osborne, arrested some years previous in that city for bank embezzlement. No doubt existed as to his guilt, but he had got off through some quibble of the law, aided too, most people believed, by money fully lavished in his favour.

The prosecutors, confident of his conviction, had neglected to prepare an indictment on a second charge, by which they might have held him, and the criminal disappeared. Now, after these years, he had been again seen in America; he had passed the intervening time in Australia, and fled to avoid the consequences of implication in a daring forgery. Telegrams from Melbourne stated that as yet the insufficiency of evidence

put him beyond the reach of the extradition treaty, but the idea was, if he were caught, to hold him by the untried criminal charge, and give the Australian prosecutors an opportunity to complete the chain of proofs which would place him in their hands.

Henry Osborne! Mr Caruthers knew now where he had before seen the man this day encountered. He had been in New Orleans at the time of the trial; had on several occasions visited the court; the stranger secreted in Denis Bourke's house was this fugitive from justice.

He recollected something else too; the money expended to prevent his conviction was said to have been provided by a girl, supposed to be either his wife or his mistress! Mr Caruthers understood Phillis French's secret at last!

His first sensation was one of horror at the thought that Georgia Grosvenor had been for month's exposed to this woman's society,—that Maurice had so narrowly escaped becoming her victim.

Before he could resolve upon any plan of action, a message came from Mrs Conyngham; she desired to see him at once.

He went to her sitting-room, and found her in a state of great agitation.

"I saw you drive up," she said; "why did you not come to me?"

"I stopped to read my letters," he began, but she could not wait for him to finish his sentence.

"Has Georgia consented?" she asked.

Mr Caruthers shook his head.

"But she shall go!" Mrs Conyngham exclaimed. "Phillis French is in the town; I saw her drive past. I sent her word I must see her, and she promised to stop on her way back."

This speech inspired Mr Caruthers with a new idea. If he informed Miss French that he had recognised Henry Osborne, she might, in her eagerness for his departure, herself insist on Georgia's leaving her house. He had no intention of threatening the girl—even at this pass he was incapable of employing such means—but his horror at the thought of Miss Grosvenor's being longer exposed to the contamination of her society, made him feel that his clear duty was to do everything possible to separate the pair without delay.

"What do you expect to gain by talking with her?" he asked.

"I shall tell her—but never mind. Have you seen Maurice?"

"Yes; he has gone away."

"Gone!" cried Mrs Conyngham. "Then he has discovered something—Phillis French has betrayed herself!"

Mr Caruthers repeated what had occurred—described Maurice's frantic excitement, and his words to Georgia.

"He has found the girl out!" cried Mrs Conyngham. "And you say Georgia still refused to go?"

"She did not consent. You may be sure Miss French has managed to enlist her sympathies and Mr Bourke's too by some specious falsehood," Mr Caruthers said.

"Maurice's going off leaves my way clear," said Mrs Conyngham. "I shall try to make the girl herself decide Georgia to leave."

"Will you allow me to see her for a few moments before you have any conversation with her?" Mr Caruthers asked, after a moment's reflection.

"Yes—but why?"

"I think I can assist you," was all he said—he had no mind to betray the discovery he had made.

"Very well; as you please," returned Mrs Conyngham. "I know there is some dreadful secret in that woman's life, she deserves no mercy."

Mr Caruthers fully coincided with this sentiment, though he did not express an opinion.

"I will go down stairs, and bring her up here when she comes," he said. "It is understood that you let me see her alone."

"Yes; I'll stop with Sybil till you send for me."

After a few more words they parted. Mr Caruthers descended, and Mrs Conyngham sought her friend's apartment. The widow was in her sleeping-room, lying on the bed.

"Don't get up," Mrs Conyngham said, "I'm only waiting till Mr Caruthers has seen Phillis

French—he has found out something—I don't know what. She will be here before long; he is to take her to my room, and I'll wait in your salon till he sends for me."

Mrs Mayford asked a few questions, but she seemed very drowsy and tired, and sorry to have disturbed her. Mrs Conyngham went softly into the adjoining chamber, and closed the door, to wait with what patience she might until summoned by Mr Caruthers.

Sybil Mayford waited for a while, then she got off her bed and hobbled to a closet which communicated with Mrs Conyngham's salon; the door was locked, but a person stationed there could hear every word of any conversation going on in the parlour.

Mr Caruthers was standing in the piazza when Phillis French drove up.

Her cheeks were scarlet, but so far from looking troubled or cast down, there was a fire in her eyes, a triumphant expression in her face whereat he secretly marvelled. It hardened him too still more against her, for it roused a fear she had hit upon some plan which would extricate her from the difficulties into which Henry Osborne's appearance had thrown her. She might hope even yet to deceive Maurice anew—might delude Georgia into helping her.

He stepped forward and assisted her to alight.

"How do you do, Mr Caruthers?" she said. "You have your judicial look on to-day. I am sure you are dreaming of the time when you will

be judge in the supreme court! Mrs Conyngham has sent for me; her message was so urgent that I feared Mrs Mayford might be worse."

"She is very comfortable indeed," he replied stiffly.

"Delighted to hear it!" cried Phillis, noting his manner, and drawing her own inference therefrom. "So it was pure anxiety to see me that caused Mrs Conyngham to send—so sweet of her. But I must not keep her waiting any longer. I'm afraid I am later than I promised, but I had a world of business on my hands."

"You look as if it had ended successfully," he said.

"I am always successful!" she exclaimed with a feverish laugh, her eyes flashing brightly upon him.

He accompanied her upstairs, opened the door of the salon, and ushered her in.

"Mrs Conyngham must be in her bedroom," said Phillis. "Don't let me detain you, Mr Caruthers, I can find her."

"She will be here presently," Mr Caruthers replied. "I wish to speak with you, Miss French, before you see her."

Phillis turned and faced him; his countenance and voice were stern enough, but she met his gaze unflinchingly.

"I am listening, Mr Caruthers," she said.

"I have something very painful to say," he continued, with a sudden sensation of pity rising, in spite of his harsh judgment.

"Then the more quickly and the more plainly you say it the better," she answered, still keenly regarding him.

The defiance in her eyes and voice subdued his half-formed sympathy. He drew the newspaper from his pocket, held it before her, and pointed to the paragraph which concerned Henry Osborne.

She grew very pale, but her gaze did not shrink under his.

"I perceive you have already seen the paragraph," he said, with his lawyer's quickness; "I need not trouble you to look at it."

He folded up the journal, steadily regarding her. He saw one convulsive shudder shake her frame, then she stood motionless as a statue—a terrible dread dimming the fire in her eyes.

"Well?" she asked hoarsely.

"Henry Osborne is in Mr Bourke's house. I have seen him," Mr Caruthers said; "at least I have suspicions so strong that I should have grounds for telegraphing to the chief of the Philadelphia police; this letter says a man has been sent on there from New Orleans, who knows Osborne well."

Phillis French slowly extended two pleading hands, and her eyes stared up at him full of agonised entreaty. Whatever her connection with the criminal might be—whatever dark or degrading secret her past might hold, she was a woman, and he pitied her; was bitterly sorry too that his opening words had been so blunt in their sternness.

"Do not for a moment think me capable of verifying my suspicions," he went on hastily; "I do not want to know—I do not want to see him again; but it was right for me to warn you, some one else might recognise him, if he is the man I suppose him to be."

Across the misery in Phillis's face swept an expression of thankfulness and relief, but she stood silent. He felt inclined to leave her without another word, so great was his pity, but he knew that later he should have reason to reproach himself for such weakness—it was his duty to impress upon her the necessity of sending Miss Grosvenor away.

"There is one thing more," he said; "understand I have no intention of covering your actions; so far as I am concerned you are perfectly free, but if you really care for your—" He paused; he could not bring himself to call Georgia her friend—"for the lady who has passed the summer in your house, there is a duty you owe to her."

"I understand," Phillis said, speaking with difficulty. She dropped into a chair and sat still for a moment to recover her strength, then she looked up at him again, and added, I do not need to see Mrs Conyngham; you can tell her that her niece will go."

"Excuse me; it would be better you should do so, going away so abruptly might rouse a suspicion in Mrs Conyngham's mind that I had told you something very serious."

"I will see her," Phillis said.

He bowed and went out of the room; an instant after, Sybil Mayford crept forth from the closet, and lay down again upon her bed.

Even in this moment of supreme agony, Phillis French's indomitable will enabled her to triumph over the physical weakness caused by pain and terror. A carafe and glass stood on the table within reach of her hand. She poured out a goblet of water, and drank it.

The door opened, and Phillis rose; Mrs Conyngham, wearing her coldest and stateliest aspect, swept into the chamber.

"Good morning, Miss French," she said. "I am much obliged to you for coming—pray, sit down."

"You must excuse me; I am in great haste to get home; my grandmother is not well," Phillis replied. "Will you tell me why you sent for me?"

She made no effort to behave as if she supposed the summons had any ordinary cause; she looked fixedly at her hostess, with a haughtiness which that lady considered insolence. Maurice had thrown the girl over; no necessity for pretence remained. Mrs Conyngham was not usually an ungenerous woman; but so much suffering had come to her through this dangerous creature, that she could not forgive her even now, when it appeared certain Maurice had escaped from her wiles.

"Do you know that my nephew is gone?" she asked.

"I know that I told him to go," Phillis answered; "and I bade him never come back. Does that satisfy you, madam?"

Scarcely the manner in which Mrs Conyngham had expected her words to be received, still she found comfort in the assurance that everything was over between Maurice and this girl; though for Phillis to declare that she had given him his dismissal, was a fresh insolence and a falsehood; of course, Maurice had gone because she could not satisfactorily account for the presence of the stranger in her garden at midnight!

"I suppose you did not send for me merely to ask this question? What other business have you with me, madam?" Phillis continued.

"I want you to insist on my niece's going," cried Mrs Conyngham, flushing into anger. "Maurice wishes it too. I have no desire to intrude on your secrets; no desire to injure you in the opinion of the people you live among; but I cannot permit my niece to remain in the house of a young woman who lays herself open to suspicion by going out at midnight to meet—"

"Ah!" interrupted Phillis, with a contemptuous smile, "Mrs Mayford played the spy, did she? Pray, give her my compliments on the return she made for my hospitality."

"You could hardly have expected her to be silent, considering that my niece was under your roof. I know, of course, that either Georgia is ignorant of what happened, or that you have excited her sympathy by some specious explana-

tion; but I warn you that it would not deceive me."

"Do I look inclined to offer you any?" demanded Phillis. "Well, madam, what you mean is, that unless your niece goes away to-morrow, you will try to injure my character by slanderous reports—is that it?"

"I repeat I have no wish to meddle with you or your secrets, Miss French," returned Mrs Conyngham loftily; "but I shall do my duty, if you force me, and my conscience will acquit me of any such coarse intentions as those you name."

"And you call yourself a Christian!" Phillis said, in a low, slow voice, of intolerable scorn. "Madam, no threat could frighten me into begging Georgia to go. If I were to tell her what you have said, no power under heaven could induce her to stir."

Mrs Conyngham perceived that she had allowed anger to carry her too far; the creature was right—Georgia would not stir.

"Miss French!" she exclaimed.

"Your niece will leave my house to-morrow," pursued Phillis, in the same slow, scornful voice; "not because of your threats, but because I wish to set myself free from you, and all belonging to you. You have degraded yourself unnecessarily, and I know you well enough to be certain it will hereafter prove a terrible humiliation to recollect that you descended to a meanness worthy of your friend Mrs Mayford, but out

of keeping with your character. If I desired to punish you, I could not do it so effectually as this miserable memory will—and now I shall bid you good-bye."

She walked to the door, swept a low, graceful curtsey, and disappeared, leaving Mrs Conyngham quite stunned between anger and a feeling more resembling shame than she liked to recognise.

CHAPTER XII.

GEORGIA'S anxiety had grown overwhelming as the hours passed and Phillis did not return. Grandma, though disinclined to rise, was cheerful and in a mood to talk, and Georgia had to account for Phillis's absence—converse quietly—hide every sign of excitement, until it seemed to her that the restraint she was forced to put upon herself would drive her wild.

At last grandma fell asleep again, and Georgia hurried out of the room. The old-fashioned clock in the hall was just striking five.

"Georgia!" called Phillis.

Miss Grosvenor looked up and saw her friend mounting the stairs. She followed, but Phillis never spoke or turned her head until they were in her chamber.

"In heaven's name, Phillis, where have you been?" cried Georgia. "How fearfully tired you look. What have you been doing?"

"Setting myself free," Phillis replied, with a strange smile. She opened her pocket-book—

took out a bank cheque and placed it in Georgia's hands.

"The money!" exclaimed Miss Grosvenor. "You are paying me back the money!"

"Not you, but the person from whom you borrowed it," said Phillis.

"Oh, how did you find out!" groaned Georgia.

"Mr Peyton told me. Wait—don't speak—let me do him justice—he did not mean to tell! He was so furious that he did not know what he said; he stopped himself, but I understood."

"Oh, you quarrelled! Phil, Phil, what has happened?"

"Of course, I could not waste a moment in paying him. There is the cheque; see that it reaches him without delay," pursued Phillis, without heeding Georgia's agonised supplication.

"Phillis, Phillis, what mad thing have you done? How did you get the money?"

"I have sold the farm," said Phillis. "Mr Travers has always wanted it. He would advance nothing on a mortgage. I sold it, and this is the first of the purchase-money."

"Great heavens!—sold the farm!"

"I'd have sold my soul sooner than let the day pass without paying the money!" cried Phillis. "It seems you don't know me yet, Georgia. Be indebted to the man who condemned me — who believes me a vile, lost woman—I!"

Georgia sprang towards her, and pressed her hand over Phillis's mouth.

"Stop," she said; "you are crazy—oh, so was he when he came! Try to explain quietly; did you tell him?"

"I had no need to tell anything," replied Phillis, as Georgia released her. "Mr Peyton looked into the room where we were."

"You and—and Mr Osborne?"

"Yes. Your brother saw him on his knees; he was promising, begging, trying to persuade me to give up the investments instead of paying the annuity. He could make a fortune if I would; he—oh, you can imagine."

"And Maurice—"

"Went into the parlour. I followed. I don't know what he said, only his first words showed me what he thought; so then I went as mad as he, and then he dashed off. That's all I can tell you," said Phillis, sitting down in a chair, her brief excitement over.

"And Maurice has gone," sighed Georgia. "I don't know where; he has promised to telegraph."

"Then you will send him the money at once. Thank God, he has gone!" said Phillis. "And now listen to me, Georgia; I want to finish all this talk. You know I love you; I know you love me. Give me a proof of affection—you can—but only one."

"What, Phil—what? Oh, you know I'd give my life! What do you want me to do?" demanded Georgia breathlessly.

"I want you to go away to-morrow with your aunt."

"Oh, Phil, not that! I can't, I won't leave you!"

"You must," said Phillis firmly. "You can do no good here; you may do great harm just by your presence. I must be entirely alone when Denis Bourke comes—alone till everything is done. I cannot explain—I will not. Georgia, Georgia, if you love me, promise to go!"

"I can't Phil—I can't!"

"Then I must turn you out, or go away and hide somewhere with—with *him*," said Phillis. "Your aunt won't go without you. Only think if they should discover! and they might—they might. I cannot be safe till I am here alone; Georgia, you must go to-morrow. Think if by staying you endangered me—if somebody recognised him! You must go."

"I will, I will!" sobbed Miss Grosvenor, falling on her knees, and hiding her face in Phillis's lap.

"My good Georgia—my darling girl!" Phillis said softly, "that is right—that is the one help you can give."

They clung to each other for a few seconds in silence. Phillis broke down, too, for a little, but soon recovered herself.

"We mustn't cry," she said. "Think of grandma; how is she?"

"Better, but she is in bed still. Oh, Phil,

Phil, what will she do when she knows you have sold the farm?"

"I am to have it for a year. There is time enough; we need not think of that," replied Phillis. "Now, Georgia, write to your aunt and say you will go. If you don't she will be coming over here, and we want the evening to ourselves."

"Oh yes; nobody must come."

"Then write. Joe Grimshaw is here to take Whitefoot home; he can drive over with the note first.

Georgia dashed off a few lines, and Phillis called Cinders to carry the note down to Joe, whom she had found on her arrival, and had bidden wait, as she wanted to send him to the town.

"Cinders can pack your trunks," Phillis said "Now, Georgia, we will go to grandma; she mustn't be agitated. We will have some tea, and put everything out of our heads for the present."

The old lady received the news of Georgia's departure with more composure than they expected; physical weakness perhaps dulled her faculties a little for the time.

Joe Grimshaw returned with a missive for Georgia from her aunt, full of rapturous delight and affection; but Georgia flung the billet aside without having patience to read it.

Grandma got up and had tea with them, and even sat in the parlour until beyond her usual

hour, and though somewhat weak and languid, there was nothing to make the girls anxious. They devoted the evening to her—talked—sang—read aloud—both glad to escape being left alone together, for their conversation would be sure to stray back to subjects it could do no good to discuss, could indeed only bring added pain.

When they at last saw grandma to her room and the care of Cinders, who always slept in the chamber adjoining the old lady's, Phillis said resolutely,—

"Now, Georgia, we are going to bed at once—to sleep also. We are both thoroughly worn out, and sleep we must have."

So they separated, each promising the other to retire without delay, and keeping the promise—Phillis even exceeding hers, for she fell asleep almost directly. Her physical health was so perfect that bodily fatigue asserted its supremacy, and even the suffering and the agonies of suspense did not enable her mind to combat.

Georgia was less successful; she lay awake for hours, and her thoughts wandered from Phillis and Maurice to her own troubles and back again, in a dreary round.

She was going away. She should never see Denis Bourke again. The letter she meant to write him would prevent that. Going away! Her idyl over; her dream ended; oh, it seemed the only real portion of her life; all the rest looked empty as a phantasmagoria; she had

never really lived until these past months—but she must go.

Mr Caruthers was right; she could not sacrifice this man who loved her—that would be a sin, and her marrying him would prove an added fetter—an intolerable load, when difficulties and disappointments came, as come they must, and he saw plainly that his beautiful aspirations were incapable of fulfilment.

She must go, but it was for his sake, not her own. She knew now that the fullest honours the world could give, the wealth of Golcondas, the power of kings, if offered her, could not weigh so much as a straw in the balance. She loved Denis with all her heart and soul—she went away to prove that love. She could not render his life a more dreadful sacrifice, than the working out of his theories would necessarily render it—if she could have been aught else but a drag, she would have stayed—she could not—she must go!

She slept at length, and in the early dawn was wakened by the touch of soft arms about her neck—warm lips pressed to hers. She opened her eyes, and, in the dim, grey light, saw Phillis.

"I had to come," she said; "I woke up from such a dreadful dream—I wanted to be sure you were here!"

Georgia pulled her into bed, and drew the clothes about them. They huddled into each other's arms, uttering a few broken sentences,

then both fell asleep, and did not wake till the sunbeams were dancing in bright, fantastic figures across the floor.

The morning passed—Ann Raines appeared, and when she heard the news of Miss Grosvenor's departure, lifted up her voice and wept as loudly as Isaac ; even lavish gifts, from articles of personal decoration up to money, failed to console her. Old Patrick appeared, and Tabitha too, who did not leave the house once in six months, and as for Joe Grimshaw, he did nothing but invent excuses for numerous visits, wearing a visage of distress that would have befitted the chief mute at a funeral.

Grandma still kept to her bed—not ill, only weak, and it was a relief to the girls to leave her a good deal to Ann Raines's care, for if she had been up and able to watch, her quick intuitions might have discovered that troubles beyond the pain of parting affected both.

The two managed to find constant occupation ; they decided Georgia had forgotten to lay out some books for packing ; went to the bottom of a great box before the volumes were discovered, and then had to repack. Now and then a moment of weakness would overtake them, but was quickly subdued, each earnest in self-control for the other's sake.

"What shall I do without you ?" Georgia would cry, catching Phillis in her arms. "You will write — every few days — tell me everything ?"

"Everything," said Phillis, still the stronger, though before noon she had again visited Bourke's house. Georgia waiting for her by the lake, had seen Henry Osborne and quieted his impatience; aided him too in his physical suffering, which had steadily increased during the night, in spite of every remedy his experience of such paroxysms could suggest.

Then, again, Georgia cried out in her misery,—

"That old life I am going back to—that I hate so. Oh, Phil, Phil, what will become of me?"

"You will marry Mr Caruthers," Phillis answered slowly. "Fate will be too strong for you—it is for all of us."

"Never!" exclaimed Georgia. "I will never do it! Some time you will tell Denis why I went—years hence."

"Yes," said Phillis, "when the right time comes."

There was no secret between them now. Phillis understood that for Bourke's own sake—his alone—Georgia meant never to see him again, and Georgia knew that, all her life long, Phillis must remember the brightness of her personal dream. Afternoon came; the train would leave at four o'clock.

Aunt Conyngham sent a note warning Georgia to be punctual—Georgia replied that she was ready. Mrs Conyngham feared to present herself, so she wrote. She would have liked to make Mr Caruthers her messenger, in

order to learn what was going on at the Nest, and gain some idea of Georgia's state of mind, whereby to regulate her own conduct when they met; but Mr Caruthers wisely declined to comply with her request—his intuitions were too delicately keen for him to venture to thrust his presence upon the girl during those last hours.

A telegram reached Miss Grosvenor from her brother, dated at a place called Warfield. He desired her to send Joe Grimshaw on, to bring his luggage and ride the horse back, but Joe had gone to attend to some matter Bourke had left in his hands; however, Patrick promised that the boy should start in the evening. Mrs Conyngham's note had said they should stop at Warfield for the night, in order to let Mrs Mayford rest.

"I shall see Maurice," observed Georgia, as she put the despatch in Phillis's hands. "He will ask—oh, what shall I say?"

"Nothing—except that he must go on," replied Phillis. "It is not likely he would come back—I should—oh, I should die if he did."

Georgia had said good-bye to grandma—her trunks were in the cart—she and Phillis meant to walk to the station.

The servants, after returning again and again to say farewell, had departed, and Ann Raines had retired to have "a good cry," under pretence of attending to Mrs Davis.

It was time to set out. The two girls lingered

—looking furtively in each other's faces—talking about any trifle that presented itself.

"It doesn't seem possible yet that I can be going, Phil," said Georgia suddenly.

"I was just ready to say it," Phillis answered.

"We must start," said Georgia. "Good gracious! Mr Sykes hasn't taken the boxes—what does he mean?"

"He has gone into the kitchen for a rope—he will get down as soon as we," said Phillis. "We must go, Georgia."

"Yes, we must go," echoed Georgia.

Yet they both hesitated. They gazed again in each other's eyes—made a step forward at the same instant. Then a carriage rattled up the hill, and a lady seated therein waved her parasol gaily, as the vehicle stopped at the gate.

"Your aunt!" Phillis exclaimed.

"We shall walk all the same—there is plenty of time. She has come to bid you good-bye," returned Georgia.

In her excited state Phillis had much ado not to laugh hysterically at the idea of the lady's coming with that amiable intention. She knew that Mrs Conyngham could not feel safe until she secured her niece; but she only said,—

"How very kind!"

"We will go and meet her," said Georgia.

"By all means," responded Phillis.

They walked down the path; but before they reached the gate, Mrs Conyngham had alighted from the carriage, and was hurrying towards them.

"I thought I would come for you, Georgia," she called. "We deposited Mrs Mayford in the waiting-room, and Mr Caruthers is struggling to get our arks checked."

By this time the three met; Aunt Conyngham kissed her niece on both cheeks, and grasped Phillis's hand with great cordiality; she was positively radiant.

"You need not have taken the trouble; there is plenty of time; we want to walk," said Georgia ungratefully.

"Dear Miss French, I am so sorry to say good-bye!" cried Aunt Conyngham, disregarding her niece's remark. "It is always so sad a ceremony:—ah, this is a world of partings!"

"Oh yes!" said Phillis, with her most careless air and smile.

"I'm afraid there is not time for me to go in and say good-bye to your dear grandmother," observed Mrs Conyngham, glancing at her watch.

Phillis stood where she could look down on the road, which led to the station. She saw Denis Bourke hastening up the hill; he had just arrived by the afternoon train.

Denis must be allowed to say farewell to Georgia. She would not stop now—there was no danger. But Phillis did not believe this separation between him and Georgia was to be lasting; anyway, she owed to Denis the right of a few parting words.

"Plenty of time, Mrs Conyngham," she said.

"Grandma will be so glad to see you; please come. Wait here, Georgia."

She hurried Mrs Conyngham up the path. Georgia sat down on a bench to wait. Just as the pair disappeared into the house, the sharp click of the opening gate caused Miss Grosvenor to turn her head; she saw Denis Bourke coming towards her.

"I am back, you see; earlier than I expected," he cried, waving his hat in the air.

"He had come. Oh, the parting! If she could only have been spared this," was Georgia's thought. He had got near enough to notice her travelling-dress. He noticed the trunks. He moved forward, stern and white.

"Going!" he exclaimed. "You are not going?"

"Yes," returned Georgia, trying to smile—lifting her agonised eyes to his. "I told you we might start any day; my aunt has business in town—"

The sentence died unfinished. He had seized her two hands in that masterful grasp which always seemed to overpower her will.

"Not like this?" he cried. "You can't go like this!"

"I must," she said; "I must!"

"But you love me, Georgia—you love me—say that—only say that—"

"Don't!" she interrupted. "I can say nothing! I will write to you!"

"I shall follow," he answered firmly.

"You must not—indeed, you must not!" she pleaded. "Mr Bourke, it is all over—try to forget me—we ought not to meet again!"

"Ought we to break our hearts—yours as well as mine?" he cried. "You love me—you have owned it."

"Georgia!" called Mrs Conyngham.

She had come out of the house—caught sight of Bourke, and hurried forward, Phillis following.

Bourke did not release Georgia's hands.

"Let me speak to you alone," he said aloud. "Come into the garden a moment—come!"

"Georgia, we shall be late—we must go!" cried Mrs Conyngham. If Mr Bourke will kindly end his theatricals, it will be a favour."

Bourke still held Georgia's hands fast, as he turned towards her aunt.

"Madam, your niece loves me!" he exclaimed. "I have a right to speak! Georgia, Georgia, don't go until you have owned the truth! If you do, fate will be too strong for you—you will marry a man whom you do not care for, and be wretched."

"Less so, I should fancy, than spending her days in Mr Bourke's old farm-house!" cried Mrs Conyngham, nearly out of her senses with anger and fright.

"Hush, aunt!" Georgia said, half in anger, half in entreaty.

"Georgia," pleaded Bourke, "let your heart speak—let it save you—save me! Put by that fear of injuring my life. If you take

my hope away, you take half my energy and strength! Georgia, life shall not be hard for you—you know you can trust my word; I I would not promise if I could not fulfil it!"

"Oh, we must go!" exclaimed Aunt Conyngham. "Georgia will write to you, Mr Bourke—let her go!"

"Speak, Georgia!" he urged. Just then the gate opened—he saw Mr Caruthers. "Remember—you don't realise it, but you are deciding now! If you go, the world conquers—heart and soul perish. Georgia! Georgia!"

"I must go," she moaned. "Oh, don't think me utterly heartless—I should not be afraid for myself; oh, believe that!"

"Georgia!" he cried in ecstasy.

"Georgia!" groaned Mrs Conyngham.

"You can't leave Phillis just now," he pleaded.

"Miss French!" exclaimed Aunt Conyngham, turning to Phillis, with a fairly menacing gesture.

"It is better for her to go," murmured Phillis.

"Oh, now I understand!" said Denis. "Georgia, don't you see! Mrs Conyngham has been threatening her!"

"Sir, how dare you!" cried that lady.

Georgia, absorbed in her misery, did not even hear! Mr Caruthers was close to them, deathly pale, but calm.

"It is time to start," he said. "Is Miss Grosvenor ready?"

Georgia bowed her head—tried to rise—Bourke held her hands still.

"Don't you hear, Georgia?" he called. "Phillis wants you—your aunt has threatened her—told her she will repeat—"

"Did you?" Georgia interrupted, turning her agonised eyes upon her aunt.

Aunt Conyngham strove to deny—her face made confession though.

"Speak, Phillis; tell the truth!" cried Bourke. "She can't hurt you or anybody; speak!"

"Miss French knows that her friend ought to go," Mr Caruthers exclaimed, carried beyond prudence by his fears.

"What!" retorted Denis. "You have not helped this woman to torment a helpless girl? I'll not believe that!"

"No, no!" rejoined Phillis; "Mr Caruthers was very kind; but—"

"Mrs Conyngham threatened you; you hear, Georgia?"

"Aunt!" cried Georgia.

"You will not be insane enough to listen to such slanders, Georgia?" pleaded the agitated lady, wringing her hands.

"Did you threaten?" demanded Georgia. "Ah, you did—you did!"

This certainty and Mr Caruthers's words proved the crowning stroke.

"I can't go—I will not go!" she said. "Aunt, nothing shall induce me to leave Phillis at present."

"You mad girl!" Mrs Conyngham fairly shrieked. "Oh, it will end in your marrying that miserable beggar."

Georgia bowed her head; a light broke over the pallor of her face, and illuminated her eyes.

"If I am ever worthy," she said.

Bourke uttered an inarticulate cry of joy; Aunt Conyngham stood speechless; Mr Caruthers stepped forward.

"Good-bye, Miss French, he said; good-bye, Mr Bourke." He took Georgia's hand, kissed it, let it drop, saying only, "You are a brave, true woman. Whatever you finally decide, may God's blessing rest upon you." He turned to Mrs Conyngham, "We have not a moment to lose," he added.

The vanquished lady hesitated for an instant, then accepted his arm, burst into a passion of tears, and was moving on in silence.

"Aunt, aunt, not like this!" cried Georgia.

Mrs Conyngham ceased weeping and confronted her, hard and stern.

"When you come to your senses, when you give up these people, I will pardon you; until then, never!" she exclaimed.

Georgia did not answer; Mr Caruthers led Mrs Coyngham away. The carriage drove off,—the three stood there alone.

CHAPTER XIII.

MAURICE PEYTON'S mad gallop did not end till he reached Warfield, a town some forty miles away.

It was late in the night when he arrived. He went to bed at once, and soon after day broke, physical fatigue forced him into a slumber from which he did not wake until noon. He dressed and went out; sent his telegram to Georgia, and dragged through the rest of the day as best he could.

Life had suddenly become a torment—the world a hell! How was he to bear the misery—how find strength to walk on amid the darkness—he, to whom suffering was so new, so inconceivable?

Towards sunset he strolled down to the station; it was time for the train which ought to bring Joe Grimshaw and his luggage, but the express by which he meant to go on to New York would not arrive for a couple of hours yet. He should have a letter from Georgia—news of Phillis French—but to what avail?

Fool that he was to think of her—she had deceived him from first to last. She was another man's wife—no other solution of this mystery possible—the wife of a wretch so vile that he had been forced to hide from the arm of the law. Poor, miserable Phillis! A sudden reaction of feeling filled him with pity for her. She must have married this creature when so young, and paid such a terrible penalty for her folly, since it was evident that she had left him —had even concealed the fact of her marriage.

Neither Georgia or Denis could know—they would have told him. No, Phillis had carefully guarded her secret, but she had broken his heart thereby. Ah, she might have trusted him —it was her duty when she saw that he loved her—might have warned him before his soul had so wholly gone out towards her that the loss of his dream must wreck his entire future.

The train arrived; Joe Grimshaw did not appear, but Maurice saw his aunt and Mr Caruthers descend, and moving forward, had the pleasure of assisting to carry Mrs Mayford into the station.

The widow was too tired, and the others too wretched, to be capable of surprise at this unexpected meeting.

"Where is Georgia?" Maurice asked.

"Not now—I can answer no questions now," Aunt Conyngham exclaimed in a tragic voice. "Wait till we are at the hotel."

"Georgia couldn't make up her mind to leave

her friends," sneered Sybil Mayford, affecting to lower her voice for Maurice's special benefit.

Mrs Conyngham turned sharply on the venomous little reptile.

"I wish you would be quiet, Sybil," said she. "As you know nothing whatever about the matter, you had better leave me to explain."

The widow saw by the expression of Mr Caruthers's face that he highly relished the rebuke she had received, and it was slight wonder, for she had tormented both her companions beyond measure during the journey.

Mrs Mayford immediately buried her face in her handkerchief and appeared dumb from wounded feeling, but nobody noticed or cared. At heart she was glad and exultant; while pretending to sleep, she had understood enough of the conversation held by Mrs Conyngham and Caruthers to be convinced there had been more between Georgia and that gentleman than she had dreamed; but it was all over—she gleaned this information too. Georgia would marry Denis Bourke; ruin her own life; and Mr Caruthers was left free. And here came Maurice, looking so wretched—half mad—that she could feel satisfied with the revenge she had gained. Altogether the widow had consolations enough to compensate for Mrs Conyngham's stern reproof, though she would have responded by bitter tongue-thrusts, instead of taking refuge in wounded sensibility, had she not feared to disgust Mr Caruthers by such a display.

When they reached the hotel a strenuous effort was made by her two long-suffering friends to persuade the invalid that she ought to go to bed at once; but she persisted in lying down on a sofa in the sitting-room provided for them, and vowed she would eat no dinner unless the rest of the party dined with her there.

Mrs Conyngham felt too thoroughly dispirited for a combat; besides, she was eager to pour her woes into Maurice's ears, so she took him to her chamber, under a pretence that Sybil must, at least, rest a little; and on the same plea Mr Caruthers hurried off, in spite of her protestations that she was not tired; that she needed society instead of the solitude to which they were so heartlessly condemning her.

Maurice received his aunt's news with an apathy that proved the crowning blow to her angry despair, and drove her nearly frantic.

"You are content to see your sister marry that beggar!" she cried. "Are you utterly without any common feeling?"

"Oh, Bourke is not a beggar," returned Maurice wearily. "There are a great many things you do not understand. I can't explain. Don't worry yourself,—there's no need."

"No need!" she repeated.

"Well; no use at least. Georgia will do as she pleases."

"It is your duty to return and bring her here," cried Aunt Conyngham. "That house is no place for her; that girl, Phillis French, not fit society."

"A better one never lived," cried Maurice angrily; "you must not speak a word against her."

"If I could only get Georgia away, I should never want to talk or think of her," returned his aunt. "Oh, Maurice, Maurice; for pity's sake, for all our sakes, go back and persuade her to listen to reason, to—"

"Go back! I would not do it to save your soul and mine," interrupted Maurice savagely. Then he checked himself, and added more quietly, "I shall not meddle in Georgia's affairs; she knows what she wants—she must make her own choice."

"She is mad, and so are you," cried Aunt Conyngham, fairly wringing her hands; for once in her life so moved beyond self-control, that she gave way to a melodramatic outburst of wrathful grief, such as no human being ever before saw her display or would have believed her capable of. She sobbed and wept, abused Georgia, upbraided her nephew, and in the same breath pleaded with him in frantic terms to save his sister.

Maurice's senses were so dulled by suffering, that he could only sit and watch her in a kind of stupefied wonder, vaguely touched by her distress, and yet all the while so lost in his own misery, that he did not even remember to offer such poor crumbs of comfort as he might, without breaking his promise to Bourke, have bestowed upon the disappointed woman, smitten

by the direst blow which fate could ever deal—wounded mortally in her vanity and her pride.

"I wish you wouldn't make such a noise!" he sighed drearily. "You put everything out of my head. It seems as if there was something I wanted to tell you; but I can't remember what it was."

Mrs Conyngham ceased her lamentations, and sat staring at him in troubled astonishment; his apathetic quiet disturbed her more than any show of emotion could have done, it was so unlike his impulsive nature, which generally, either in anger or grief, was dramatically demonstrative. She had been so absorbed by her bitter disappointment, and the hope of inducing him to rise his influence with Georgia, that she had scarcely noticed his looks—they startled and alarmed her, now that she did observe them.

His face was ghastly with a yellowish pallor like that of a corpse; the cheeks were shrunken, the forehead knotted and corrugated with pain, the veins standing out on it like whipcords, and the great black eyes blazing with a sombre light.

"Oh, Maurice, you are ill!" she cried. "You must go to bed—you ought to see a doctor at once."

"What a ridiculous old auntie you are!" he answered, with a burst of mirthless laughter, which made her shiver. "I never was better in my life! I shall go on to town by the next train; that stupid Joe Grimshaw hasn't brought my luggage yet, but it is no matter."

"Oh, wait for us—wait till to-morrow!" pleaded Mrs Conyngham. "Indeed, you are not fit to travel! Oh, my poor boy, something dreadful has happened, I know. You have found out that miserable girl—there is some awful secret about the man she is hiding. I am sure Mr Caruthers has discovered too—"

"If Caruthers opens his lips, I'll choke the life out of him!" broke in Maurice.

"You know he would not—he is always kind—always generous," replied Mrs Conyngham. "Oh, that crazy Georgia, to reject such a man! And now you make me so anxious; I declare I shall go mad between you!"

"I wouldn't—it's not worth while," said Maurice, sinking back into the unnatural composure, which seemed the more strange from its contrast to that momentary burst of passion. "I say, it's no good to talk—let me go away—I'm tired."

"Do stay—please stay!" cried his aunt. "I'll not speak a word that can annoy you; I won't even talk about Georgia any more now. Don't go, Maurice—don't go!"

He had risen, and was moving towards the door. She hurried after him, and laid her clasped hands on his arm. Even while pleading so earnestly, so full of anxiety, she was conscious of vaguely wondering if it could be really she conducting herself in this stagy fashion.

"Well, well, I'll stop," he said, just to end her frantic expostulations.

Some one knocked at the door.

"Who is it—what do you want? You can't come in!" called Mrs Conyngham.

Rosalie's voice gave answer that dinner was waiting. Mrs Mayford felt quite faint, and begged there might be no further delay.

"I wish Mrs Mayford was dead!" exclaimed Aunt Conyngham.

Maurice broke into that dreadful laugh again; the dismal sound, and the violence of her own ejaculation, did a great deal to restore his aunt to her senses. She was frightened about him, and ashamed of herself. There must be an end of dramatic scenes—she might be wretched, but she need not be undignified.

"You will dine with us, Maurice," she said. "Go into the sitting-room. I will come in a few moments."

Maurice, too weary to argue, went back to the chamber where Sybil Mayford was persecuting poor Mr Caruthers, who had unluckily returned, expecting to find Mrs Conyngham and Peyton there.

"Dear me, Maurice, how ill you look!" cried the widow, as he entered. "So does Mr Caruthers and your aunt for that matter. What on earth has happened to you all?"

"Sybil, my dear," said Maurice, with a ghastly attempt at the careless, bantering manner in which he usually treated her, "you are in a mood to torment and scratch, I see—reminiscences of some former stage of existence, doubtless—

but you know of old that you can't tease me, though you may Caruthers and the aunt."

"Maurice Peyton, you are the rudest man alive!" exclaimed the widow angrily.

"Thanks, my beloved friend," said he.

Mr Caruthers was standing with his back to the chimney, resting his arm on the mantel. Sybil saw a half-amused, half-contemptuous smile cross his worn, tired features, which seemed positively to have aged since the morning; the contempt was for her, the widow knew, and it roused her into one of her small cat-like furies.

"It's like sitting at a play to watch you all," sneered she. "Cousin, you are tragic, and Maurice is melodramatic. What a pity neither Georgia or Phillis French are here to enjoy it—but I suppose, between the fascinations of Mr Bourke and that mysterious stranger they are hiding—such a respectable thing to do, they have no time to regret your loss."

"Excuse me, Mrs Mayford," said Mr Caruthers; "I think you forget that you are speaking to Miss Grosvenor's brother. Besides, I am at a loss to understand on what grounds you base your assertion that Mr Bourke's visitor is in hiding."

"Perhaps I know more than you think!" cried she.

"You told us that you did not hear a word of the conversation last night—so how can you know?" he asked, eyeing her sternly.

She coloured violently under his glance, but said spitefully,—

"My dear cousin, pray do not imitate Maurice's rudeness, one may excuse him, because he will be only a silly boy if he should live to a hundred."

Unfortunately for her, Mrs Conyngham entered while she was speaking; the stately lady had recovered her self-control; she meant to make no more scenes, and to permit none. She went up to the sofa where Mrs Mayford was lying, bent over her, and said in a low tone,—

"If you are guilty of a single impoliteness more—if you throw out so much as a hint upon any subject which can be unpleasant to either of us, I shall start for New York to-night, and leave you here alone. No, you need not cry," she added, as Sybil gave a premonitory sob. "Unless you can be perfectly calm, and conduct yourself properly, we shall allow you to dine in solitude."

Aunt Conyngham, firm in her restored composure, was not to be trifled with; the widow knew she must go no further.

"Are we ever to have any dinner?" she asked fretfully.

"Please ring the bell, Maurice, and tell them to serve us at once; we are all tired, and poor Sybil needs nourishment," said Aunt Conyngham, in her most mellifluous voice and her best manner.

The dinner passed pleasantly enough; Maurice

suddenly began to talk in a reckless, nonsensical way, which was a sort of caricature of his ordinary light-hearted style, and though Mrs Conyngham was troubled thereby, and perceived that Caruthers shared her anxiety, they both endeavoured to appear at ease, and the widow always going from one extreme to the other—too selfish to notice or care about anybody else—waxed very sweet, and decided she must by her amiability cause Mr Caruthers to forget Georgia—a fate which her insatiable vanity positively convinced her she could accomplish.

Aunt Conyngham could not bear to lose sight of Maurice for an instant; she begged the two gentlemen to smoke where they were, instead of going downstairs, and Mr Caruthers, comprehending by her significant glance what her motive was, at once consented, and the widow, by way of putting the finishing touches to her fascinations, insisted on lighting "Cousin Herbert's" cigarette, putting it to her painted lips as she did so.

He thanked her with ceremonious courtesy, but as he took it from her hand he crossed the room, and Mrs Conyngham saw him fling the cigarette away, but he stood so that the fair Sybil could not see him, and when he returned he was smoking.

About nine o'clock Rosalie appeared to say that Joe Grimshaw had arrived, and wanted to speak with Mr Peyton.

"Tell him to come up," Mrs Conyngham said,

and the boy soon entered, to have the pleasure of hearing the widow in an audible aside to Mr Caruthers pronounce him "such an uncouth little monster that he was actually picturesque." But her witticism received no attention from the gentleman, and Joe was much too sensible to be hurt, though he took his revenge—unnoticed by the others; he made her a bow so profound that it became an impertinence, for which she longed to box his ears.

"So you have got here at last, Joe," said Peyton. "I suppose you have brought all my luggage?"

"Yes, sir; everything's put up proper," Joe replied. "I left the trunks to the depot, 'cause I thought you wouldn't want 'em. I missed the express, and had to come by a freight train; that's what makes me so late."

"It is of no consequence. You saw Miss Grosvenor?"

"Yes, sir. She sent her best love, and told me to tell you she would write to you to-morrow to N'York."

"Thanks. Ask the hotel people to give you some supper and a bed; to-morrow morning you must ride my horse back," Maurice said, longing, hungering for news of Phillis, yet resolute not to ask a question; enraged beyond endurance, too, with his own contemptible weakness for wishing to do so.

Joe was about to speak, putting his hand in the breast-pocket of his jacket at the same in-

stant; but Sybil Mayford, watching with huge ecstasy the misery in Peyton's face, could not resist her desire to say something that would be disagreeable, and she interrupted,—

"You must be that wonderful Joe Grimshaw I have heard them all talk about so often."

"Yes'm," said he. "I didn't know I wuz very wonderful; anyhow, I'm Joe Grimshaw, sartin."

"Has Mr Bourke's visitor gone away?" she asked.

"No, ma'am; he's been took very sick," replied Joe, supposing that, since she knew of the guest's presence in Bourke's house, the embargo of secrecy which had been laid on him did not apply to her. "That's the reason Miss Georgia couldn't write, Mr Peyton; they're all three busy. I've got a telegram fur Mr Caruthers," he continued, drawing his hand out of his pocket, with a yellow envelope therein. "It came after he went away, and the hotel folks sent it over to Mr Bourke's jest as I was a-starting, and Miss Gus-ve-nor told me to fetch it."

"Mr Caruthers took the despatch, opened it, stared round in wonder, then exclaimed,—

"In Heaven's name, what can this mean?"

Joe Grimshaw chanced to be looking at Mrs Mayford; he saw her begin to shake from head to foot like a person in an ague; then she lay back on her pillows, and covered her face with her hand.

Maurice snatched the paper Caruthers mechani-

cally extended towards him, and forgetful of Joe Grimshaw's presence, of Sybil Mayford's too, read the telegram half aloud,—

"Your message received — trusty man who knows—will be there early in the morning."

The telegram was signed by a man whom Maurice knew was the chief of the Philadelphia police.

"My God!" he cried. "Caruthers, you ought to be shot—you have betrayed that poor wretch!"

"You know I am incapable of it," returned Mr Caruthers; "I sent no telegram. Who can have used my name?"

His glance happened to fall on Joe Grimshaw, and he made a sign to Maurice to remind him of the boy's presence.

"Go out, Joe," said Peyton, "and remember —not a word!"

"No, sir!" cried Joe eagerly. "It was the lady there sent the telegrum."

"What!—Mrs Mayford!" Mr Caruthers and Peyton exclaimed together, while Mrs Conyngham uttered a cry of angry wonder, and the miserable culprit cowered lower among her pillows, then lifted her head to sob.

"You little wretch! how dare you say such a thing!"

"'Cause you did, ma'am," returned Joe stoutly.

"You sent a telegram in my name?" demanded Mr Caruthers, turning upon the woman

with a face so changed by anger that it hardly seemed his. "You dared to do it?"

"Cousin, cousin, don't believe it—he lies!" she shrieked.

"No, ma'am; 'tain't me that's a-lyin'," Joe replied, with emphasis.

"Tell us what you know about it, Joe," said Maurice.

"I was down to the depot, Mr Peyton, when they all three got there," said Joe composedly. "Fust your aunt, she drove off to Miss French's; then arter a while Mrs Mayford, she got fidgety, and said she knowed they'd miss the train, and made Mr Caruthers go to the house. Jist as soon as he wuz gone, she sent Injin Joe fur the telegrum-man; and when he came, she said,—'Here's a despatch my cousin, Mr Caruthers, wants sent to onct.' Old Hummins, he tuk it and read it out. I was a-standin' outside the door, and I heerd, though I warn't a meanin' to listen — whatever I be, I ain't mean, Mr Peyton."

'No, no!' cried Maurice. What did the despatch say, Joe?"

"Henry Osborne is here—send at once," Joe replied slowly, as if reading the words. "That was it, letter for letter, and I wondered who on earth Henry Osborne could be; not having an idea it was Mr Bourke's visitor, else I'd ha' told him—but I thought his name was Ransom."

Mrs Mayford lay speechless, trying vainly to articulate, though knowing that denial was use-

less. She had signed Mr Caruthers's name to the despatch, because aware that would cause the chief of the police to give it instant attention, and as Mr Caruthers seldom went to Philadelphia, had been confident he would not discover what she had done.

For the first time in their experience of him, his three friends saw Mr Caruthers roused to a pitch of ungovernable wrath. He strode up to the sofa, and said in a voice like iron,—

"If that man is arrested, I will prosecute you for having made an illegal use of my name! Now speak—tell the truth too!"

Sybil Mayford only answered by a frightened groan. Mrs Conyngham called out,—

"Do you hear, Sybil! Oh, Mr Caruthers, send the boy away!"

"Let him stop!" returned Mr Caruthers. "It is probable that Mrs Mayford will have to speak in a place where speaking will be more difficult—she may as well grow accustomed to hearing her own voice proclaim her wickedness and her shame."

"Oh my God, my God, why can't I die!" moaned the wretched creature.

"As soon as you please, after you have confessed," her pitiless judge made answer; "but do that first."

"Mr Caruthers, Mr Caruthers!" cried Mrs Conyngham. "Oh, be merciful!"

"When she shows that she has any claim thereto, by offering full confession of her guilt," he

replied, still in that iron voice. "Mrs Mayford, you listened while I was talking to Miss French—you could have found out in no other way! Don't waste time—speak!"

"Yes, I did," she moaned; "I sent the telegram! Oh, don't have me punished! If you don't promise, I'll kill myself—I will!"

"So slight a threat could not influence me," he replied; "such an act would be the one service you could render all who have the misfortune to be connected with you. If there is time to save that man, you go free—if not, you meet your punishment. Maurice—come, we must telegraph."

"The message wouldn't be delivered till too late," Peyton said, rousing himself; "besides, it would only inculpate Bourke uselessly. No—I must go—if there's no train, I'll find a horse—mine is not fit."

"There'll be a train as far as Toby's Mills in a couple of hours," cried Joe Grimshaw; "there you can get a horse, Mr Peyton."

Sybil Mayford was shrieking in violent hysterics, tearing wildly at her hair, so mad with shame and fear, that for the time she was actually a lunatic.

"Go out, go out—send Rosalie!" ordered Mrs Conyngham. "Maurice, you will see me before you start."

"Yes, yes! Do you want a doctor for that woman?"

"No; he could do no good—she must scream

herself quiet. Tell Rosalie to come. If the people hear the noise, say it is only a fit of hysterics."

The two gentlemen hurried away, followed by Joe Grimshaw, and Mrs Conyngham was left to her task of quieting the miserable creature, the sight of whom filled her with a sensation sharper than contempt—her own remorse had begun. Phillis French had warned her that the unworthy threat she had uttered would, sooner or later, become the most humiliating recollection of her life—the prophecy was fulfilled already! She had been an arrogant woman, a hard woman, but always proud and honourable—that menace to Phillis was the one mean action she had ever committed, and she felt its unworthiness with terrible force as she looked at the frightened sufferer before her, and knew that, much as she despised her, she must despise herself still more.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN the carriage which bore her aunt and Mr Caruthers away had disappeared, Georgia sunk down on a bench, and covered her face with her hands. She realised what she had done; she was not frightened, not sorry, but a strange awe filled her soul. She had voluntarily cut herself loose from every mooring of her old life—the new existence had begun.

She was left for some moments to complete silence; presently she called, without lifting her head,—

"I am not crying, Phil—indeed, I am not."

Then she heard Denis's voice say softly and tenderly,—

"Georgia, Georgia!"

She looked up—Phillis had disappeared—Bourke stood gazing at her with his whole soul in his eyes.

"I—I didn't hear Phil go," she said, while a sudden shyness sent a wave of brilliant colour across her cheeks, and the half-pleading, half-

wistful expression and attitude softened her stately beauty into such perfection that Denis marvelled thereat.

"Come into the garden for a little," he said presently, offering her his arm.

She took it without a word; he felt her hand tremble, and he was no less agitated himself. His bronzed face had paled, and his eyes shone with an intense, eager light. They walked on till they reached the arbour; as they sat down, Bourke drew a long, deep breath of content.

"I hardly, dear, believe it is real!" he exclaimed, gently taking her two hands in his. "The dear hands, the beautiful hands! mine to hold—mine to keep! Say it once, Georgia—just once!"

"Yours if you will," she answered tremulously, though without hesitation.

"My darling, my darling!" he murmured, pressing his lips on the delicate rose-tinted palms. "My brave, noble Georgia!"

"You must be good to me?" she said pleadingly.

"Indeed, indeed, I will."

"You must be patient with me, I mean," she continued, her girlish embarrassment lost in womanly earnestness. "I don't know this Georgia—she is a new creature to me."

"But you are not afraid!" he cried. "Ah, Georgia, can't you tell me that you are glad—that you are happy?"

"I am glad—I am happy!" she answered.

"I feel—oh, I can't express it—as if I had been battling against a tempest, and suddenly found myself in a haven of peace and rest. But if I have done wrong—if—"

"Georgia, Georgia! don't say that. There must be no fears, no doubts now."

"I did not mean wrong towards myself," she replied, "but to you."

"You have made me the proudest and happiest man alive," he exclaimed. "This very happiness shows me how black and lasting the night would have been if I had lost you. I never dared to think—oh, I knew the world would not conquer."

"No," she said, "you and Phillis had taught me too much for that to be possible. But when I reflect how useless I am—when I think that I may be a drag upon you! Please, please don't think I am speaking selfishly. I am not afraid for myself, indeed I am not."

"God bless you for those words!" he cried. "Georgia, you have done right—your heart and soul tell you so. This last hour was the crisis—the turning-point was reached."

"I knew that—I felt it!" she replied. "Yet up to the end I did not mean to yield. Oh! the words seemed to utter themselves in spite of me."

"But you were glad, glad! Ah, say it once more—just once!"

She looked full in his face with a beautiful smile.

"I can only repeat what I said. It seems as if I had suddenly been brought out of the tempest into a land where it is always afternoon," she murmured. "Yet it seems selfish to be happy. Oh, I am so grieved to have my aunt angry. I love her. I did not know how much, until I saw her go away without even bidding me good-bye!"

"She will forgive you at length," he replied, with an odd smile.

"I don't know. She can be very stern and hard. And oh—don't be vexed—poor Mr Caruthers — he is so good. Much as I respected him, I never half appreciated his worth till that last moment."

"He is one of the noblest men living," cried Denis. "Nobody who was not a real hero could have behaved as he did. But you cannot reproach yourself—you were honest from first to last. I don't know how, Georgia, but there will be some compensation for him. He won't be allowed to suffer long; he is too noble and upright for that to be permitted."

"Indeed, it seems as if it must be so—I must think that—only I am afraid it is only a selfish excuse to put his pain out of my mind."

"No, it is not! See, Georgia, you must not let your conscience grow morbidly sensitive. We are all given to that when we are very earnest to do right. It is a mistake. The feeling often makes people do wrong, women especially. How often they marry men just because

to refuse would cause temporary suffering, and so commit an injury that is lasting."

"Ah! you see that is just what I am afraid of —that I have done you a wrong," she replied, trying to speak playfully, but the sentence ended in a sudden rush of tears.

"No, no; because you love me!" he cried. "Georgia, Georgia, have done with that fear now and for ever! It is the only wrong you could do yourself or me; it is a wrong to our love, and God sent us that, so it must be a gift we are to guard preciously."

"I have done with it," she said, wiping away her tears; "I will never think it again—I promise you."

He caught her in his arms; their lips met in the first ecstatic kiss of love and happiness. For a few moments she leaned her head passively against his breast, while he murmured half intelligible words of tenderness and blessed promises for the future, which she understood with her heart rather than her outward ears. After a little she lifted her head, though she did not try to withdraw herself from the shelter of his embrace—it gave her a sense of repose and safety—she had reached her heaven at last.

"Oh, poor Phillis, poor Maurice!" she sighed; the very fullness of her own content rousing a bitter pang of sympathy as she contrasted their suffering therewith. "It does seem wicked to be so happy when they are miserable."

"My child, everything will end well for them —be sure of that!" cried Bourke. "I never dreamed until lately what Maurice has in him; he never really knew his own nature, any more than you did yours. You will see—we must write to him—he must hear the whole—you will see!"

"You are always so determined an optimist," she said, smiling. "But I like to believe you; it is such a comfort. If I can see them happy—see him, you know—and if the poor aunt could only learn to be reasonably satisfied."

Denis's eyes began to laugh, but he said gravely,—

"At least you are so. You are not afraid of being poor; you don't call my aims mad, or even impracticable any longer!"

"I think they are the grandest that a man ever had!" she cried. "I'm not half good enough to share them; but to do whatever I can to help, I shall hold the highest work that could have been given me. I owe you this; I ought to say it; I was convinced long ago."

"Thank God!" he ejaculated.

"But you must have patience; you must teach me," she continued. "I shall make dreadful blunders; you know my idle, extravagant habits; but I'll try, and Phillis will help; she will show me how to be economical and wise. I am sure I can learn, though my aunt would not believe it, or Maurice either. Oh, I must go and write to them. I can't bear

to have her angry with me. I must convince her that at least I have done what is for my happiness."

Bourke laughed outright. She looked up wonderingly.

"She shall be appeased," he said. "Georgia, you may write to her that the mendicant won't always keep you a prisoner in his old farm-house."

"Ah! now you are beginning to think about making a fortune. You don't trust me, after all. You mean to let me be a drag and weight; to give up your great work in order to make my life smooth," she cried reproachfully. "I won't have it; I don't want to be rich."

"I am afraid you must be one day," he said; "however, it may not come for a good while yet—you will have plenty of time to practise living on limited means. Only, just to console the aunt, you may tell her that the next time she goes to Europe she can visit one of the finest castles and largest estates in Ireland, and enjoy the idea it will some day belong to you and me."

"Oh, you have cheated me all along!" she cried in a sort of dismayed wonder, which made him laugh again. "I should have been glad a few weeks ago, now I am sorry! Oh, I thought I was going to prove good for something—for your sake!"

"You have proved that you are capable of the greatest thing of all—the being true to your own soul!" he answered, in a voice at once earnest

and proudly exultant. "No change in my prospects can ever change my plans, Georgia; increased means may widen my duty, but cannot alter it. That was why I kept silence. Unless you could share that duty, believe in it, enjoy it, much as I loved you, I could not ask you to share my life. It was the aim and the work you had to accept. Whether I am a Pennsylvania farmer, or the owner of great estates, the principle which actuates me must be the same."

"Yes; I begin to understand," she said. "But I wish you had not told me yet."

"I might have waited, just to give myself the pleasure of seeing how beautifully you would behave; but it would seem cruel not to set poor Mrs Conyngham's mind at rest," he said; "and when you add that sometimes you could have the sweet privilege, if you chose to exercise it, of being addressed as 'My Lady,' I fancy she will be tolerably content."

"Oh," Georgia quite groaned, "this is too much. I think I never will forgive you, Denis Bourke."

"Console yourself," he replied; "the title is an ornament I have no intention of ever wearing. If the uncle chooses, he can leave a good deal of his money away from me. Phillis told you why he was angry and sent me off?"

"Oh yes, and you did right—right!" she cried, with proudly flashing eyes.

"In that case," he continued, after pausing to kiss her hand, by way of thanking her for her

exultant praise, "I should have to count my shekels almost as carefully as I do now, in order not to risk cramping my ability to be of use. There, it is all said; time enough to think of the future when it comes. What we have to do is to be happy and useful in the present, my noble, grand-hearted woman."

"But you would have let me go without speaking," she exclaimed; and though the words implied a reproach, her voice showed that they meant admiration and reverence for the steadfastness of purpose, the strength of soul which would have enabled him to put duty even before his love.

"Yes, Georgia. We could only have been miserable together unless you accepted my aims —that had to be! It would have broken my heart to give you up; but, Georgia, there is one thing higher than love—the doing right, being true to our souls! Not for a reward in another existence, but to help to the full extent of our power, be it little or great, be the field of action obscure or prominent, the carrying on of the noblest work life offers; the uplifting of the human race; the progress of the world towards light; the fulfilment of the creed which Christ taught; the reign of peace—that is, wisdom! It will come at length, through the highest cultivation of all human faculties; through the recognition of the truth, that in the endless sweep of infinitude there can be no break, nothing unimportant, everything and creature deathless;

development the law, by learning and following which, what men call sin shall fade, and God become all in all, since His creation must be a portion of God himself."

His eyes shone with a strange, far-seeking light; his face was grand with something beyond enthusiasm,—with the certainty of truth, the one truth which alone stands out clear amid the impenetrable mystery, that wraps mortal existence; which slowly, surely, shall at last shine so plain that all men will comprehend the meaning of the glorious sentence that has rung its anthem of hope and joy down through the mists of ages,—"*God looked upon his work and said, 'It is good.'*"

Georgia sat gazing up at the speaker, with a countenance elevated and illuminated like his own. When he paused, she leaned her forehead on the hand he stretched towards her, and murmured, with her whole heart in her voice,—

"And I thank God for my priceless gift—your love!"

"The last glory of the sunset had faded—twilight had gathered about them unaware—when they were interrupted by old Patrick's approach.

"Come quick, Misther Denis!" he exclaimed. "The gintleman's took worse—he wants Miss Phaylis! come quick, for there's death in his face—I've seen it too often not to know the signs."

They hurried back to the house; Georgia

called Phillis out of grandma's room, and they told her the news as gently as they could. She was terribly shaken, but did not lose her self-control; she explained to the old lady that she was obliged to go to some sick person, and might not be back till late, and grandma, still under the influence of the opiates she had taken, scarcely asked a question.

Phillis and Bourke hastened off, and Georgia remained with grandma, who seemed placidly glad, but not surprised that her favourite had decided to remain longer at the Nest. She fell asleep at length, and then Georgia went herself towards Bourke's house. Denis met her near the lake.

"Patrick was right," he said; "the man is dying."

"Oh, poor Phil!" cried Georgia.

"Yes, but she bears it well; after all, dear, it is a blessing," Denis answered.

"But you must have a doctor—"

"Old Barlow drove by just as we got to the house—I knew I could trust him—but indeed, silence is unimportant, it will be all over by daylight. He has been suffering for years from heart disease—must have had wonderful vitality to last so long."

Dinner was waiting and they tried to eat; after a while, Phillis came down for a few moments, and drank a cup of tea, and took some nourishment, then they all went upstairs.

The dying man was conscious, and could talk;

he wanted to be alone with Phillis, so Georgia and Bourke sat in the next chamber, Denis going now and then into the sick room to help to move the sufferer on his pillows, or aid Phillis when a paroxysm of pain seized him.

Their watch lasted till day-light; as dawn broke, Georgia opened the window and leaned out over the sill. The sound of a horse's feet rang up through the stillness; her first thought was a quick dread that the fugitive had been traced—at least it was too late—he was rapidly passing beyond the reach of human justice.

Bourke entered as she turned away from the casement. She told him what she had heard; and he was about to go downstairs and discover if her fears were correct, when the door opened, and Peyton appeared.

"You must get that man away," he said rapidly. "The officers will come by the first train—thank God I have got here in time! Patrick says he is ill, but you must hide him—if you do not, he will be arrested!"

"Phillis came in while he was speaking; he did not see her till she said quietly,—

"There is nothing to fear—my father is dead."

Maurice staggered against the wall, and they heard him mutter,—

"My God! I thought he was her husband!"

When Peyton could speak and hear after the first dizzing rush of emotion had passed, Phillis had gone out as noiselessly as she entered, and Georgia had followed her.

Bourke summoned Tabitha and old Patrick, and while they were busy in the dead man's room, he told Maurice the whole of Phillis French's story.

Shortly after Mrs Grainger's death, Phillis learned that her father was alive—received an eager appeal for assistance, which she could not for an instant hesitate to grant. He had escaped from the shipwreck in which he was supposed to have perished; had been living since that time in Mexico and New Orleans; was about to be brought to justice in the latter city under the assumed name which concealed his identity.

Mrs Grainger had left Phillis sixty thousand dollars; she went at once to New Orleans, secured the two most famous criminal lawyers in the state as his defenders, and he evaded punishment.

She owned the farm in Pennsylvania, and took her grandmother there to live; the fund left her after the enormous expenses to which she had been subjected, was used for her father's benefit, though she wisely persisted in merely sending the annual income to him in his Australian refuge.

Bourke had been in New Orleans at the time of the trial; he knew French — had, indeed, narrowly avoided losing a considerable sum through his means, and Denis's sympathy and counsel were Phillis's support during that terrible period—had been her comfort and guide ever since.

When Phillis reached her new home she found the adjoining place for sale, and knowing that Bourke proposed to buy a farm, she wrote to him, and in a few weeks he became her neighbour. Her correspondence with her father always passed through his hands, in order that no suspicion might ever be roused in her grandmother's mind, and his advice had helped her to hold firm to her resolve about the money, in spite of her father's pleadings and reproaches.

French wanted to get possession of the capital by specious assurance of the fortune it would enable him to make for them both, frequently menacing her with a return to America if she did not consent. It was this threat which had caused the excitement in Phillis that several times so sorely puzzled Georgia during the first weeks of her stay at the Nest.

Later, Phillis lived for a season in a constant agony of suspense, aware that her father had carried out his resolution of leaving Australia, though unaware then of the reasons which had obliged him to flee.

Bourke had not supposed the man would venture to come east of California; he had at length promised not to do so, and for a little while Phillis had rested on this hope. But French, secure in his disguise, believed that he might with impunity go on to the Atlantic coast, and that her fears for his safety would induce Phillis to yield to his demands, and enable him to sail for Europe possessed of funds sufficient to carry

out his real plan of realising a fortune, based on an insane faith in some marvellous theory—the practical illustration whereof was certain to break the bank of every gaming establishment on the Continent.

As Bourke ended the explanations which rendered clear the character of the heroic girl—her patience, her fortitude, the positive grandeur with which she had supported her dismal burthen—Phillis and Georgia entered, supposing that the two men had gone downstairs.

Maurice went quickly up to Phillis—bent on his knees before her, and pressed his lips to the hem of her gown.

"You are the bravest woman God ever made!" he said in a broken voice, then rose and left the room without another word.

CHAPTER XV.

NEARLY two years had gone by since Phillis's father was laid in his grave. The secret of his relationship to her had been easily kept; even grandma did not know that the fugitive criminal who died under Bourke's roof was her son-in-law; she supposed, as others did, that he had sought shelter there, a complete stranger, and that finding him ill, Bourke had taken him in without a question—an act too much in keeping with his ordinary conduct to surprise anybody.

Old Mr Travers died a few months later; and as his heirs did not want the farm, Phillis had no difficulty in securing it. Grandma Davis passed painlessly away about a year after the close of the unsuspected tragedy in her granddaughter's life—happy to the last, having no wish ungratified, since she left Georgia and Bourke near her darling.

The pair had been married almost immediately—married, too, from Aunt Conyngham's house; and that lady even forgot her sympathy for Mr

Caruthers in her satisfaction at Georgia's prospects, which, in her mind, included an acceptance on Denis's part of the title; but her niece knew better.

Georgia and Bourke did not forget their friend, and the one shadow on their happiness was removed a little while before the second anniversary of their wedding-day—Mr Caruthers wrote to tell them that he was about to be married. Sybil Mayford bore the tidings with tolerable composure; for she had known that her cousin was lost to her, and she could have no vengeance whatever—not even the pleasure of so much as uttering a whisper against Phillis French; for it was upon this condition alone that Mr Caruthers allowed her evil action to remain unnoticed.

It was the close of a gorgeous summer day; Phillis was seated in the garden. She had just sent Ann Raines away, and with her Joe Grimshaw, who had entered her service, and was growing rapidly into a tall, energetic, young man.

She had given all her orders for the next morning, and could now indulge in an hour's quiet—of dreams even, for she had learned to allow herself that luxury. She had not seen Maurice Peyton since the morning of her father's death; he had gone away without other farewell than those admiring words uttered when he knelt at her feet in reverential homage. He was in Europe, studying art as diligently as if he had been a poor man, and within the last

few weeks, pleasant wafts of praise, an earnest of what the future might bring, had greeted him from the exhibition of his pictures.

He was coming home now; before winter he would arrive, and it was of this arrival that Phillis dreamed, as she sat there in the soft twilight. He had never once written to her of his love or his hopes—but she knew that it was for her he was coming.

She was roused by the sound of footsteps on the shorn turf, and without turning her head, called gaily,—

"Denis what makes you so late? I have been expecting you for the last half-hour. Bring Georgia out here—it is too pleasant to stop indoors."

There was no answer—she looked round. Maurice Peyton stood there, holding out his hands in eager supplication. Before she could move, he was at her feet again, crying,—

"I have tried to grow worthier of you; I have tried! I would not come back till I had shown that at least I meant to do that! Phillis, Phillis, will you give me happiness and honour beyond my deserts—can you learn to love me?"

And she smiled down at him, saying softly,—

"I do not need to learn—I did it from the first."

The sunset faded—the moon rose, round and full, flooding the garden with silver light. Through the perfumed distance came Georgia and Bourke, unable to control their eagerness

any longer; and their loving words of congratulation helped Phillis and Maurice the more fully to realise that never in this world could there be any dividing for them in the new path they had entered.

THE END.

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